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The Appropriation of the Theme of Christ's Descent to Hell in the Early Syriac Liturgical Tradition

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The Appropriation of the Theme of Christ's Descent to Hell
in the Early Syriac Liturgical Tradition

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Jesus Christ's descent to the realm of the dead, called Sheol *(shyôl)* in Syriac, is a central motif of the Syriac-speaking churches. This dissertation investigates the motif in the early Syriac literary and liturgical traditions and analyzes its appropriation by the liturgy of the East Syrian Church as set out in the contemporary printed editions of its Missal and Breviary.

Because of the Syriac tradition's preference for symbol, metaphor, and poetry as vehicles to articulate and contemplate the Christian faith, this dissertation employs a hermeneutical approach that accounts for the interplay of literary and liturgical genres, attends to the multilayered sedimentations of language, and addresses the dynamic assimilation, transposition, distortion, and refiguration of the theme.

Chapter two sets out the language and imagery of Sheol in the Syriac Bible *(Peshitta)*, identifying the cumulative impact of the biblical imagery that the Syriac writers took up in a privileged way. Chapter three presents and evaluates the literary history of the descent motif, discerns the meanings that emerge in particular historical, cultural, and theological contexts, and identifies the compositional strategies that influenced the motif's development, in particular reinscription, amplification, and embedding.

Chapter four demonstrates how the liturgical tradition extends and advances interpretative horizon of the Syriac literary tradition. The analysis focuses on the East Syrian tradition's liturgies for Pasch, Epiphany *(Denḥâ)*, baptism, and eucharist in their ritual contexts. These texts refigure the descent myth and its symbols to mediate the meaning of Christ's redemptive work for the community of faith.

The final chapter reflects theoretically on the interweaving of discourses in East Syrian liturgy. The intention is to delineate the 'appropriation' of the descent motif by the East Syrian liturgy, explicate how the motif generates theological meaning through the genres of liturgy, and elucidate how the motif in the Syriac liturgical tradition contributes to the wider theological tradition in terms of eschatology, pneumatology, and soteriology. The doxological character of liturgical language demands that when it appropriates an image, motif, or metaphor, it reconstitutes and reorients it. In these liturgical texts, the tradition's language is broken and refigured to emphasize the assembly's participation in the new life that comes from Christ's Pasch.

This dissertation by Richard Edward McCarron fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in the Department of Religion and Religious Education approved by Mary Collins, OSB, Ph.D., as Director, and by Sidney Harrison Griffith, ST, Ph.D., and Margaret Mary Kelleher, OSU, Ph.D., as Readers.

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TRANSLITERATION SCHEMA FOR SYRIAC

ܐ	', â (as *mater lectionis)*
ܒ	b
ܓ	g
ܕ	d
ܗ	h
ܘ	w, ô/û (as *mater lectionis)*
ܙ	z
ܚ	ḥ
ܛ	ṭ
ܝ	y, î (as *mater lectionis)*
ܟ	k
ܠ	l
ܡ	m
ܢ	n
ܣ	s
ܥ	ʿ
ܦ	p
ܨ	ṣ
ܩ	q
ܪ	r
ܫ	sh
ܬ	t

Vocalization:

·	a
·	ā
·	o, u
·	e
·	î

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The world of Syriac-speaking Christianity in general and of its liturgies in particular remains largely unknown to the majority of western scholars of theology and liturgy. Syriac is a Semitic language, a dialect of late Aramaic. The earliest pagan inscriptions in Syriac are found in the city of Edessa in the first and second centuries of the common era. Syriac in its Edessene dialect became the common language of the peoples of Mesopotamia and Persia. Syriac also prevailed as the literary and liturgical language of Christians in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, as well as those even further East in the Persian Empire (now present- day Iraq and Iran). Arabic replaced Syriac as the *lingua franca* after the seventh century, though Syriac survives as a literary and liturgical language to the present.[1]

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1. A modern dialect of Syriac is used as a language by the educated classes in some parts of East Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. Classical Syriac is used in the liturgies of the following Churches: the Church of the East (or East Syrian Church); the Chaldean Catholic Church; the Syro-Malabar Church; the Syrian Orthodox Church (or West Syrian Church); the Syro-Malankara Church; and the Maronite Church. However, vernacular languages, like Arabic, English, and Malayalam, have come to replace Syriac as the liturgical language in many of these churches.

Though this tradition has been historically marginalized, scholars who seek to develop a theology of liturgy and sacrament have much to gain from close examination of the Syriac Churches. This is especially the case for the liturgical theologian who is attentive to Christian celebrations in the margins of the dominant western and Byzantine traditions and who seeks to interpret and transmit a liturgical heritage that takes the full range of Christian traditions into account.

To this end, my study will investigate the early Syriac liturgical tradition as it is extended in the East Syrian liturgy. It will examine an element that this tradition shares in common with the Greek- and Latin-speaking Churches. This is a central motif used to speak of the significance of Christ's redemptive activity in his Passion, Death, and Resurrection, namely the descent of Jesus to the realm of the dead after his death on the cross. This realm of the dead is named *hadēs* in Greek, *infernus* or *inferus* in Latin, and *shyôl* in Syriac. The proclamation that Jesus descended to Sheol is thoroughly constituted by mythological language and the particular cosmologies of the early Judaeo-Christian world.

The descent motif has both fascinated and confounded preachers, teachers, artists, and theologians from the very beginning of Christianity to the present. Yet assemblies of Christians in East and West still use the motif in their liturgical celebrations today without any apprehension for these concerns. A brief survey of the most significant literature on the descent is in order. I will thus be able to situate my examination of the descent motif in the early Syriac literary and liturgical tradition in the ongoing conversation on the descent motif. This ongoing conversation favors the Latin and Greek

traditions, and only recently have Syriac scholars treated the motif from indigenous sources.

Status Quaestionis

The motif of Christ's descent to Hell *(hades, inferna, inferos)* has been amply addressed by twentieth-century scholars. The primary areas of inquiry are biblical studies, comparative religion, historical and dogmatic theology, art history, and liturgy.[2]

In biblical studies, both Protestant and Catholic exegetes have sought to prove or disprove the presence of the doctrine of the descent in the Bible, specifically the New Testament, by historical-critical methods. Among the pericopes that figure in these studies are Ephesians 4:9, 1 Peter 3:18–22, Philippians 2:7, Colossians 2:15, Acts 2:24–28, Matthew 12:40, and Matthew 27:52. The most controverted passage is 1 Peter 3:18–22. It is most frequently used to prove some activity of Jesus after death. However, since the study of K. Gschwind, this passage is taken to speak of the activity of the risen Jesus, not of the dead Jesus.[3] The classic studies of W. Bieder, B. Reicke, and W. J. Dalton take into account apocalyptic literature to confirm this interpretation.[4]

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2. The preponderance of the theme in medieval and modern European literature will not be treated here.

3. Karl Gschwind, *Niederfahrt Christi in die Unterwelt* (Münster, 1911).

4. Werner Bieder, *Die Vorstellung von der Höllenfahrt Jesu Christi* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1949; Bo Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of 1 Pet. III.19 and its Context*, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis 8 (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1946); William J. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6*, Analecta Biblica 23 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965). More recent studies include W. Hall Harris III, *The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7-11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken

The descent theme has also attracted the attention of scholars of comparative religion or those sympathetic with the methods of the history of religions school. These scholars examine the presence of the myth of a god-like figure or person who in death, trance, or dream travels to the underworld. They point out the descent/ascent motif in Greek, Roman, Jewish, Persian, Babylonian, Indian, Polynesian, Japanese, Egyptian, and Germanic religions. They argue for the universal presence of the descent theme in world mythology and show the consistency of the descent of Christ within this larger frame.[5]

Historical and dogmatic theologians have sought to explicate the meaning of the descent to hell, especially given its presence in the Apostles creed. They seek systematic exposition, verifiable truth claims about the descent, and a propositional language to articulate a doctrine of the descent. There is a wide range of conclusions. For example, Wilhelm Bousset rejects any notion that the descent can be predicated of Jesus. He considers the descent motif a construct of the early Church, under gnostic influence.[6] In a very different approach, Alois Grillmeier presents an extended examination of patristic

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Judentums und des Urchristentums 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1996); and Heinz-Jürgen Vogels, *Christi Abstieg ins Totenreich und das Läuterungsgericht an den Toten: Eine bibeltheologisch-dogmatische Untersuchung zum Glaubensartikel "descendit ad inferos,"* Freiburger theologische Studien 102 (Freiburg: Herder, 1976).

5. A classic example is John Arnott MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1930). See also Josef Kroll, *Gott und Hölle: Der Mythos vom Descensuskampfe*, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg 20 (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1932). See also *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2d ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1960), s.v. "Höllenabstieg Christi" by Alois Grillmeier in the section, "Religionsgeschichtliche Analoga."

6. Wilhelm Bousset, "Zur Hadesfahrt Christi," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums* 19 (1919/20): 50–66; and *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John Steely (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1970), 60–68.

evidence to discern developmental strata in the descent motif from the first to sixth centuries.[7] Herbert Vorgrimler has called for a retrieval of the descent motif from its status of a forgotten truth, since it touches many central theological concerns, like theological anthropology, the biblical and dogmatic treatments of redemption, and the universality of redemption. He expresses his dissatisfaction with the way theologians like Grillmeier, but also Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, have neglected patrology and liturgy and failed to recontextualize the question for modern theology.[8] Von Balthasar's treatment of the descent is probably the most celebrated treatment of the late twentieth century.[9] The descent to hell is a key element in his elaboration of the paschal mystery, part and parcel of his theological project that underlines the drama of the history of salvation. The descent for Von Balthasar is a crucial and final consequence of Jesus' redemptive misssion that he received from the Father.[10] He suggests a "theology of Holy

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7. Alois Grillmeier, "Der Gottessohn im Totenreich: Soteriologische und christologische Motivierung der Descensuslehre in der älteren christlichen Überlieferung," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 71 (1949): 1–53, 184–203. This appears in a somewhat revised version in *Mit Ihm und in Ihm: Christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven* (Freiburg: Herder, 1975), 76–174. See also Jean Daniélou, *Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme* (Tournai, Belgium: Desclée, 1958), 257–273.

8. Herbert Vorgrimler, "The Significance of Christ's Descent into Hell," *Who is Jesus of Nazareth?* Concilium 11 (New York: Paulist Press 1966), 147–159; idem , "Vorfragen zur Theologie des Karsamstags," *Paschatis Sollemnia: Studien zu Osterfeier und Osterfrömmigkeit*, ed. B. Fischer and J. Wagner (Basel: Herder, 1959), 13–22; and more recently *Geschichte der Hölle* (Munich: W. Fink, 1993). Two other studies pertinent to modern theology include Heinz-Jürgen Vogels, *Christi Abstieg*; and Markwart Herzog, *»Descensus ad Inferos« Eine religionsphilosophische Untersuchung der Motive und Interpretationen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der monographischen Literatur seit dem 16. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurter theologische Studien 53 (Frankfurt am Main: Josef Knecht, 1997).

9. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1990), and idem, "Eschatologie," in *Fragen der Theologie Heute*, ed. J. Feiner, J. Trütsch, and F. Böckle, 3d ed. (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1960), 403–422.

10. See *Mysterium Paschale*, 174–178.

Saturday" and underlines the trinitarian character of the descent. He also puts forth the controverted thesis that with the descent, Christ freed humankind once for all from hell.[11]

There are several issues that arise in descent scholarship within the area of dogmatic theology. First, some take the motif as an affirmation of the death of Jesus: He descends to the realm of the dead. However, other, particularly Reformed theologians, grapple with the implication that the article means that Christ descended to the realm of the damned and suffered the agonies of being forsaken by God. Theologians are also troubled by elements of the descent motif that suggest postmortem activity of Jesus. Death means the separation of soul from body, and the theologians grappled with the question of the relationship and presence of the whole Christ in Hell and whether either soul or body was separated from the Divine Person of the Son.[12] Furthermore, to speculate activity like preaching or liberation by Christ seems to continue in Hell Christ's bodily human activity on earth, implying that his death was only partial or that his descent was bodily rather than spiritual.[13]

Also in line with the theological reflection are spiritual or psychological readings of the descent that have sought to refigure the theme. Regis Martin dwells on the questions of hopelessness, despair, and abandonment, especially with regard to the

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11. See his *Die Gottesfrage des heutigen Menschen* (Vienna: Herold, 1956), 187–204.

12. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas's discussion in *Summa Theologiae* 3a., 52, 3: "Et ideo in illo triduo mortis Christi dicendum est quod totus Christus fuit in sepulcro, quia tota persona Christi fuit ibi ratione animae sibi unitae; totus etiam Christus tunc erat ubique ratione divinae naturae." Latin text from St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. The Blackfriars (New York and London: McGraw-Hill and Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964).

13. See, for example, *Summa* 3a., 52, 1 ad 3m.

Holocaust. David L. Miller takes the perspective of depth psychology to speak about inner hells and the hell of abandonment.[14]

Art historians' research into the iconography and art of the death and resurrection of Jesus have paid careful attention to the descent motif and its connection with the developing literature and art into the Middle Ages. The earliest iconographic representations of the resurrection show Jesus' ascent from the place of the dead, often with a depiction of the graphic imagery found in the Greek and Latin theological and liturgical traditions. Anna Kartsonis's work is particularly noteworthy. She traces the interrelationship between the pictorial representation of the resurrection with christological reflection on the death of Christ. She connects its iconographic origins with Orthodox polemics in the late seventh century and examines the developments through the twelfth century.[15]

With regard to the study of the descent motif in liturgy, scholars have surveyed the presence of the descent motif in a number of eastern and western liturgical texts. The theme appears in early liturgy in creedal formulae, anaphoral texts, homilies, and hymnody. Most liturgical studies show the presence of the theme in the various liturgical

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14. Regis Martin, *The Suffering of Love: Christ's Descent into the Hell of Human Hopelessness* (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede's Publications, 1995); David L. Miller, *Hells and Holy Ghosts: A Theopoetics of Christian Belief* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1989).

15. The major study is Anna D. Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986). See P. J. Nordhagen, "'The Harrowing of Hell' as Imperial Iconography. A Note on Its Earliest Use," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 75 (1982): 345–348; Elisabetta Lucchesi Palli, "Der syrisch-palästinensische Darstellungstypus der Höllenfahrt Christi," *Römische Quartalschrift* 57 (1962): 250–267. See also H. J. Schulz, "Höllenfahrt als Anastasis," *Zeitschrift für die katholische Theologie* 81 (1959): 1–66.

rites, with particular stress placed on the hymnody of the paschal season in the Byzantine tradition.[16] However, they neglect detailed study of the literary and biblical context. Some further liturgical study of the descent motif involves the baptismal liturgy. For example, P. Lund and O. Rousseau take the descent to Sheol, the three-day hiatus between death and resurrection, and the ascent to the heaven, to be the soteriological foundation of Christian baptism ritualized by a triple immersion.[17]

Studies of the Descent in the Syriac Tradition

In all the studies surveyed thus far, the witness of the Syriac tradition is rarely treated in depth if it is considered at all. When Syriac sources are considered, the focus is on apocryphal tradition and the central figures of Ephraem and Aphrahat, primarily because their major writings are available in translation. Several Syriac scholars have studied the theme in Ephraem and Aphrahat more closely, but it is only at the end of the twentieth century that the place of the motif in the Syrian liturgy has received any

16. A classic presentation of the topic is in the *Dictionnaire de l'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, ed. F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq (Paris: Letrouzey, 1920), s.v. "Descente du Christ aux enfers d'après la liturgie," by F. Cabrol and s.v. "Descente du Christ aux enfers dans les liturgies orientales," by A. De Meester. Another important study is O. Rousseau, "La Descente aux enfers dans le cadre des liturgies chrétiennes," *La Maison-Dieu* 43 (1955): 104–123. The Mozarabic Rite has been studied in detail by Emilio Aliaga Girbés, *Victoria de Cristo sobre la muerte en los textos eucarísticos de la octava pascual hispánica*, Publicaciones del Instituto Español de Historia Eclesiastica Monografías 9 (Rome: Iglesia Nacional Española, 1973).

17. The first theological evaluation is O. Rousseau, "La Descente aux enfers dans le cadre des liturgies chrétiennes," *La Maison-Dieu* 43 (1955): 104–123. See also his "La Descente aux enfers, fondement sotériologique du baptême chrétien," *Recherches de science religieuse* 40 (1951–52): 273–297 published as *Mélanges Jules Lebreton*. The Uppsala School was particularly interested in the connection with baptism. See inter alia Per Ivar Lundberg, *La typologie baptismale dans l'ancienne église*, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis 10 (Leipzig: A. Lorentz, 1942). More recently in the United States is the work of Kilian McDonnell, *Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 156–170.

attention.[18] Gerard Rouwhorst has examined the paschal hymns of Ephraem, where the descent theme appears.[19] However, he does not relate these texts to the later liturgical tradition's use of the theme. Most recently, Anthony Kollamparampil has specifically treated the descent theme in relation to the East Syrian liturgy.[20] He emphasizes a genetic approach, tracing continuity from the book of Job to the Syriac literary writers and the liturgy, without contextualizing and examining this development analytically.

Assessment

This survey of the literature and scholarship on the descent theme confirms the marginal role of the Syriac tradition and the limited nature of specific studies by Syriac specialists. It also shows that there is little methodological exploration that would help incorporate both historical and theological analysis of biblical, patristic, and theological texts, as some like Herbert Vorgrimler have sought.[21] The Syriac literary and liturgical traditions offer fertile ground for interpretation. The hallmark of the Syriac literary and

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18. With regard to Ephraem and Aphrahat, see Javier Teixidor, "Le Thème de la Descente aux Enfers chez Saint Éphrem," *L'Orient Syrien* 6 (1961): 25–40; Jouko Martikainen, *Das Böse und der Teufel in der Theologie Ephraems des Syrers: eine systematisch-theologische Untersuchung* (Åbo: Stiftelsens för Åbo Akademi Forskningsinstitut, 1978), 86–97; Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 369–376; August Vogl, "Die Scheolsvorstellungen Afrahats," *Ostkirckliche Studien* 27 (1978): 46–48; Robert Connolly, "The Early Syriac Creed," *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums* 7 (1906): 202–223. Paul Féghali, "La Descente aux enfers dans la tradition syriaque," *Parole de l'Orient* 15 (1988–1989): 127–141, treats the biblical material.

19. G. A. M. Rouwhorst, *Les Hymnes Pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe*, 2 vols., Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

20. Anthony George Kollamparampil, "The Theme of Sheol in the Syriac Liturgy: The Path to its Reception," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 113 (1999): 289–306.

21. Vorgrimler, 148–149.

theological tradition is the pervasive use of symbol, poetry, metaphor, and narrative as vehicles to articulate and contemplate the Christian faith. The East Syrian liturgy shares these characteristics as well. Moreover, the East Syrian liturgical tradition has its origins in the Christian practice in Edessa, which is characterized by its close links to Jewish liturgy and to Mesopotamian and Persian influences.

Purpose and Method

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze and articulate the significance of the image of Christ's descent into Sheol in the literary and liturgical tradition of the early Syriac churches and demonstrate its appropriation by the liturgy of the East Syrian Church using the printed editions of its Missal and office book.[22]

First, I will set out the Syriac biblical language and images, identifying and explaining the cumulative impact of the biblical imagery of Sheol that the Syriac literary tradition took up in a privileged way. Next, I will present and evaluate the literary history of the descent motif to discern what meanings emerge from a mix of narrative genres in diverse theological contexts. I will explain the compositional strategies that contribute to the development of the descent to Sheol in the Syriac literary tradition. Then, I will demonstrate that this interpretative horizon of the early Syriac literary tradition is extended and advanced by the liturgical tradition, which can be said to appropriate the

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22. While the role of art is crucial with respect to a full development of the motif, I will not take up those sources first because it is beyond my competence. I note the importance for iconography in the East Syrian church the depiction of the descent in the sixth-century illuminated Rabûlâ Evangeliary.

descent myth and its symbols in order to mediate for the community of faith the meaning and memory of Christ's redemptive work. I will then give a more theoretical account of the intersection and interweaving of discourses in liturgy, taking the East Syrian liturgy's deployment of the descent motif as my point of departure and case in point. The intention is to delineate the 'appropriation' of the descent motif by the East Syrian liturgy. I will explicate how the motif generates theological meaning according to the genric context of liturgy and elucidate how the motif in the Syriac liturgical tradition contributes to the wider theological tradition.

Hermeneutical Presuppositions

To accomplish these tasks, I will adopt a hermeneutical perspective. In contrast to the classic and most recent treatments of the descent to Sheol, I will not offer the historical-critical exegesis of biblical texts or seek to reconstruct original texts or liturgies with a comparative method.[23] In an effort to interpret and to arrive at an explication of the descent motif, I will be operating with three explicit hermeneutical presuppositions. First, I understand language as discourse, and liturgy as a particular kind of discourse. Second, genre is more than merely taxonomic; it is productive of meaning. Third, before an interpreter comes to a text, interpretation is already at work in the text itself, that is to say, every text is an intertext. I present some pertinent theories here that underlie my

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23. For a summary of the method, notice of the representative practitioners, and some critique, see Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford, 1992), 57–63.

approach to the biblical, literary, and liturgical texts under consideration in this dissertation.

Discourse

The first presupposition concerns language understood as discourse. Paul Ricoeur explains that language is to be understood primarily as discourse, recalling the description of Emil Benveniste that someone says something to someone else. Language as discourse underlines the dialectic between event and meaning, which is the starting point for Ricoeur's theory of text. Discourse is "event" because it was once realized temporally by a someone who said something. Yet, once inscribed as text, the discourse escapes the finite situation of its author and audience, according it a surplus of meaning.[24] Yet, "if all discourse is realized as event, all discourse is understood as meaning."[25] By means of the writing and the work of the text, the discourse surpasses itself: "Just as language, by being actualized in discourse, surpasses itself as system and realizes itself as event, so too discourse, by entering the process of understanding, surpasses itself as event and becomes meaning."[26] The task of interpretation that follows from this understanding of language as

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24. In short, what the text means now matters more than what the author meant when it was written or the editor meant when it was compiled. See Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: Christian University Press, 1976), 29–44.

25. Ricoeur, "Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. J. B. Thompson (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 135.

26. Ricoeur, "Hermeneutical Function," 134.

discourse, then, is aimed at discerning "the world-propositions opened up by the reference of the text."[27]

While Ricoeur does speak of the process of interpretation as following the text's movement from "sense" to the reference to new world-propositions, this implies that there is an idealized sense of the text that is separated from the reference of the text to worldly reality. It would be more accurate "to say that the sense of the text has two dimensions which are to be distinguished but never separated: namely an internal texture of references (*Bedeutungsverflechtung*) which, by reason of the nature of the act of reading build up *simultaneously* a textuality of reference to the world."[28]

However, my concern with the particular discourse of liturgical speaking requires me to push beyond Paul Ricoeur. Liturgical texts are oral texts or bear the traces of orality. That they prescribe, describe, or inscribe a liturgical performance or liturgical speech event accentuates the "impossible closure" of a liturgical text, to borrow an expression from Paul Zumthor.[29] There is a radical instability to oral texts, a dynamic quality that "dissimulates the fragility of its linguistic, vocal, and gestural elements."[30] The

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27. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 87.

28. Werner Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*, trans. T. Wilson (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 59.

29. See Paul Zumthor, "The Impossible Closure of the Oral Text," *Yale French Studies* 67 (1984): 25–42. See also his larger work, *Introduction à la poésie orale* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983).

30. Zumthor, "Impossible Closure," 33. Moreover, the fact that the liturgical "texts" originated in oral improvisation (see Alan Bouley, *From Freedom to Formula: The Evolution of the Eucharistic Prayer from Oral Improvisation to Written Texts*, Studies in Christian Antiquity 21 [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981]) and later came to function as an example or model, an *aide-mémoire*, and then a norm or object of memorization (see Tom Elich, "Using Liturgical Texts in the Middle Ages," in *Fountain of Life*, ed. G. Austin [Washington, D.C.:

liturgical celebration as event or the liturgical speech-act as corporate embodied prayer disappears, and only the discourse is fixed.[31] But this "fixed" discourse is a work, because it is undoing past performance, recreating a past performance, creating a new performance, suppressing the incongruous or maybe accentuating the incongruity, smoothing semantic difficulties and ambiguities or adding more intelligible ones.[32] Therefore, it is crucial to realize that no single actual text is ever "the one":

> Every changed form of an oral text, however minor or deliberate, is not further evidence for the virtual text, as in a stemma, but *another text*. . . . [The interpretation of] the oral text should be concentrating not on evidence away from a previous text, but on evidence concerning the oral event at hand.[33]

Therefore, "the oral text calls for an interpretation which would itself be in movement."[34] To take liturgical texts as oral texts intensifies their relationship to liturgical performance. The interpreter keeps to the fore the specific "event" character of the liturgical text as it is realized in ritual performance. As Mary Collins has argued, "The context for adequate interpretation of the meaning of liturgical texts is public ritual action."[35]

Pastoral Press, 1991], 69–83) must be considered.

31. See Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 27. On criteria for establishing the traces of orality in a text, see Franz H. Bäuml, "Medieval Texts and the Two Theories of Oral-Formulaic Composition: A Proposal for a Third Theory," *New Literary History* 16 (1984): 31–49. See also Mieke Bal, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1988), 66–73.

32. Zumthor, "Impossible Closure," 38.

33. A. N. Doane, "Oral Texts, Intertexts, and Intratexts: Editing Old English," in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. J. Clayton and E. Rothstein (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 94 (emphasis mine).

34. Zumthor, "Impossible Closure," 40.

35. *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter Fink (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), s.v. "Language, liturgical," by Mary Collins.

Genre

By attending to genre, I am making a claim about the constitution of meaning in texts. Any text—liturgical or literary— is not a random collection of words spilled onto a page. The "words" are arranged in "sentences" that are submitted to the production of a recognizable work. That is to say the fabric of the text has a "texture" that orients the reader in the vast world of innumerable texts to discern novel, poem, or treatise, or in the case of liturgy, a litany, a hymn, an anaphora, or an epiclesis. The text belongs to a genre.

A survey of contemporary use of the term "genre" reveals little agreement with regard to its definition. In some instances, genre is an ideal essence or norm (i.e., the text is an objective analogue of an exterior, transcendent genre); in others, a matrix of literary production or competence; in still others, genre is a simple term for classification of stylistic conventions.[36] In the past, critics have had a tendency to use the notion of genre mostly as a heuristic device for taxonomic identification of a text.[37] However, contemporary literary theory has expanded the understanding of genre. Theorists have moved from considering genre as merely a fixed classification category to a dynamic understanding of genre as integral to the process of textual change and production of meaning: "Genres are not merely taxonomic devices designed to help us locate a text

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36. See J.-M. Schaeffer, "Du texte au genre: Notes sur la problématique générique," *Poétique* 14 (1983): 3.

37. See Mary Gerhart, "Generic Competence in Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 43 (1988): 29–31.

('This is a novel'). Genres are productive of meaning."[38] For Paul Ricoeur, literary genres establish communication of meaning because they provide a common ground of understanding and guide interpretation through the contrast between the observed tradition of the genre and the particular text at hand: Attention to genre opens up the history of the interpretation of the text.

Thus, genres are not ahistorical, transcendent, and unchanging norms, but "historically determined, delimited, and described."[39] In the formation of a text, there are available patterns of formulation that "are at the disposal of the individual process of text formation."[40] A text is not produced in a vacuum, but within an historically preconstituted horizon of linguistic expectation that regulates the reception and appropriation of the text.[41] These are the familiar rules of the game, to borrow a term from Hans Robert Jauß, but as such they can "then be varied, extended, corrected, but also transformed, crossed out, or simply reproduced."[42]

This is not the substitution of "genre" for "structural unit" nor the division of a larger structure into smaller units. A given text is not a simple duplication of its genric

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38. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper and Row, 1987), 45. See also J.-M. Schaeffer, "Du texte au genre," 3; and Mary Gerhart, "Generic Competence," 29–31.

39. Hans Robert Jauß, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 80.

40. Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation*, 96.

41. On this notion of horizon, see H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 302–307.

42. Jauß, 88.

model, but rather the genric pattern is "worked on" by the individual text.[43] The genre does not "exist" as a static structure out of which a text is hewn; in fact, genres really are never capable of being identically realized.[44] Genres "contrast, challenge, and oppose one another" in such a way that they can change and evolve from realization to realization.[45] Genre emerges from a particular culture and according to, or in breech of, established sociocultural horizons of expectation. Attending to the way that the genre of the text conforms or contorts the repertoire preserves the dynamic character of the text as a whole. Attending to genre also governs how to negotiate the plurality of readings possible in a given text.

In the case of a liturgical text, its liturgical genre precludes a strictly historical, biographical or cultural reading, but is oriented to theological and ecclesiological readings.[46] That is to say, the genres of liturgy, like hymnody, homily, litany, or blessing prayer, emerge from and relate to an ecclesial community in a particular cultural context. As the texts are handed on, changes in the genric conventions and theological discourse of the day can impact the meanings mediated by the texts. In this study I will explore the way that the literary tradition fuses the oral, mythic, and biblical traditions and exploits the theme of Christ's descent to Sheol in different genric contexts. There remains a way that the genre controls the contours of the motif and determines what is carried over, as

43. Schaeffer, 13.

44. See Jeanrond's discussion, 97–99.

45. Cohen, 87.

46. See Jeanrond, 126–127.

my consideration of the specificity of liturgical genres will show. Grasped as oral texts in genric and ritual context, liturgical texts resist a merely philological analysis. "Selecting from among literary and ritual forms available within a cultural tradition is a generative act in the formation of the full liturgical text."[47] Thus, liturgical texts call for a deeper attention to the multilayered sedimentations of language.

Intertextuality

A particular approach that attends to the multilayered sedimentations of language and that addresses this dynamic assimilation, transposition, censorship, and refiguration is the concept of intertextuality. Because this term is very slippery, I will set forth what I consider to be the most salient features that implicitly guide my approach to the texts under consideration. Intertextuality is a stronger category than source criticism or considerations of influence and allusion. My use of intertextuality is aligned with the work of Julia Kristeva.[48] It is more a theory of textuality than a method of analysis, but it clarifies that this project seeks to elucidate the interweaving of discourses in literary and liturgical genres.

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47. *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, s.v. "Language, liturgical," by Mary Collins.

48. These conceptions of the text are closely related to her theory of the subject-in-process/subject-on-trial *(sujet en procès)*. See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. M. Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 193–234; *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 124–147; and "The System and the Speaking Subject," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 25–33. The human person is imbricated in the social and historical, in practice. This effects a rupture or rejection of the self-present and closed subject that decenters the subject and instantiates a reconsitution of the subject through language. Intertextuality allows Kristeva to integrate the speaking subject into discourse, even if this means in her terms a continual rereading of the subject. Her subject in process/trial is a recovery of subjectivity, but a subject that is not metaphysically or epistemologically construed and that is not isolated from other subjects.

Julia Kristeva is credited with having coined the term *intertextuality*, though she later retreats from it when she find it misused by other critics.[49] The term first appears in essays that she wrote in 1966 to 1967.[50] The key point of departure for Kristeva's notion of the text is the question of the productivity of texts, that is to say that a text is not a closed system of signs and signifiers that refer clearly and immediately to themselves. Texts, according to Kristeva, are not already created structures or an object where meaning is exchanged between a reader and text. Rather, Kristeva is inspired by the dialogical notion of text from Mikhail Bakhtin.[51] Kristeva understands texts as spaces that

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49. See J. Kristeva, "Le mot, le dialogue et le roman," in Σημειωτική: *Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), 82–112. See also the brief account of Timothy K. Beal, "Ideology and Intertextuality: Surplus of Meaning and Controlling the Means of Production," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. N. Fewell (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 29–32. Kristeva's neologism has taken on a life of its own. For a good survey of the current literature and "schools" of intertextuality (e.g., Roland Barthes, Michel Riffaterre, Gérard Genette), see the monograph by Nathalie Piégay-Gros, *Introduction à l'Intertextualité* (Paris: Dunod, 1996). See also the introduction and bibliography of *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. Michael Worton and Judith Still (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990); H. F. Plett, "Intertextualities," in *Intertextuality*, ed. H. F. Plett, Research in Text Theory 15 (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1991); and T. E. Morgan, "Is There an Intertext in this Text? Literary and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Intertextuality," *American Journal of Semiotics* 3 (1985): 1–40.

50. They were then collected in Σημειωτική and eadem, *Le Texte du Roman* (Hague: Mouton, 1970).

51. The Russian (post)formalist Mikhail Bakhtin developed the notion of dialogism—the open-ended, back-and-forth play between the writer, the reader, and the culture. Bakhtin attended to the dynamism of language that in every text is socially and historically grounded. Texts are not in a vacuum nor is their reference circumscribed by authorial intention. However, he locates every text within a nexus of "dialogic relationships" or as elements of a polyphony, which he contrasts with *monologism*. Monologism restricts the meaning of a text to what it tells us about the particular characters or author, not for what it discloses about the world in which it is placed. Bakhtin's *dialogism* keeps attention to the ethical and the social. Flowing from this more dynamic understanding of the text is Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia*. By this he understands that any particular text negotiates a number of languages that are socially and historically located. Bakhtin circumvented the potential indeterminacy of a text by keeping the text grounded in its social situation. For Bakhtin, the text is not a thing but a dynamic space where there is a dialogical exchange among the historical

can produce meanings themselves by the very way that they allow a plurality of previous or contemporaneous texts to cross.[52] Intertextuality, as a theory of textuality, according to Kristeva, means that "every text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, every text is the absorption and transformation of another text."[53] This is a dynamic notion of text that allows not a fixed point of meaning, but the open-ended multivocality of "the intersection of textual surfaces."[54] Roland Barthes, who is influenced by Kristeva though he goes well beyond her project, incorporates Kristevan intertextuality into his definition of a text:

> Every text is an *intertext*; other texts are present in it, at variable levels, under more or less recognizable forms: the texts of a prior culture and those of the surrounding culture; every text is a new tissue of past quotations. Snippets of codes, of formulae, of rhythmic models . . . cross in the text and are redistributed in it. . . . The intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae, whose origin is rarely recoverable, of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks.[55]

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context, the semiotics of the text, and the social situation. From this argument, he showed that a text is dynamic and itself negotiating a variety of social and historical languages and is not reducible to text-bound semiotics. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. M. Holquist and trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1981); *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. C. Emerson (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). See also Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich, Theory and History of Literature 13 (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). See also Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

52. Kristeva, "Problèmes de la structuration du texte," in *Théorie d'ensemble*, Collection *Tel Quel*, dir. by Philippe Sollers (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), 298–299.

53. Kristeva, Σημειωτικὴ, 85. "Tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte."

54. Kristeva, Σημειωτικὴ, 83.

55. *Encyclopaedia Universalis* (Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis France, 1980), s.v. "Texte (Théorie du)," by Roland Barthes. "Tout texte est un *intertexte*; d'autres textes sont présents en lui, à des niveaux variables, sous des formes plus ou moins reconnaisables: les textes de la culture antérieure et ceux de la culture environnante; tout texte est un tissu nouveau de citations révolues. Passent dans le texte, redistribués en lui, des morceaux de codes, des formules, des modèles rythmiques. . . . L'intertexte est un champ général de formules anonymes, don't l'origine est rarement repérable, de citations inconscientes ou automatiques, données sans guillemets."

Kristeva's *intertextuality* is an important corrective to both the structuralist and historicist approach to text, "insofar as it dynamizes the text, makes meaning move and gives rise to extensions and transgressions—in brief, insofar as it makes the text work."[56] What is at stake is the perception of the traces and transpositions of other texts that govern the production of meaning in a text and that there is no reference or meaning that is not already integrated into the world of language.[57]

Intertextuality also allows Kristeva to account for the historical-cultural intertext of the text under consideration. As her theory developed, Kristeva explained that the dynamic of intertextuality could allow the transposition of "other systems of signs" into a text. In a specific example she gives, the event of carnival is transposed into a narrative of carnival such that the narrative of carnival has the event as intertext.[58] Thus, the social text, cultural text, and historical text are significant intertexts inscribed in any given text to which the interpreter should be alert. Kristeva's attention to the text as production also

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This very important article gives the theoretical context of intertextuality and an enlightened reading of Kristeva. There are obvious affinities here with Jacques Derrida's notion of a text as "fabric of traces."

56. Ricoeur, "The Bible and the Imagination," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. M. Wallace (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 148.

57. Kristeva, *Revolution*, 59–60; Michel Riffaterre, "L'Intertexte inconnu," *Littérature* 41 (1981): 5–6. See also the important theses of John Frow, "Intertextuality and Ontology," in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, 45–55.

58. Kristeva, *Revolution*, 59–60. While she says that the borrowing from another sign system can be out of language, I would argue that the event is first inscribed in language and then reinscribed—or transposed as she says—to another text. See also her essay "Problèmes de la structuration du text," in *Théorie d'ensemble*, 297–316.

calls attention to these intertexts.[59] The sociohistorical intertext emphasize the worldliness of the text, preserving it from being abstracted or suspended from historical contingency.[60] In this dissertation, I will take up the specific texts that treat the descent theme after presenting the social, political, and theological 'texts' that are operative in a given period. This approach is aligned with an understanding of the liturgical text as oral text, intrinsically connected to liturgical event.

What is important to note here is that at its origins, Kristevan intertextuality is a critical theory of textuality that attempts to correct structuralist understandings of a text, prestructuralist aesthetics of text, or ideologies of text.[61] This theory emphasizes that even before a reader-interpreter encounters a text, interpretation is already at work in the text itself.[62] The interpreter must grapple with the strategies by which the text unravels a

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59. See also J. Clayton and E. Rothstein, "Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality," in Clayton and Rothstein, 20, 26–29, who extend the social-political intertext through conversation with Michel Foucault and reception theory. See also Leyla Perrone-Moisés, "L'Intertextualité critique," *Poétique* 27 (1976): 374.

60. A text, then, cannot defer its *worldliness*, as if its meaning could be in suspension without historical contingency. This is a concern of Edward Said, "The World, the Text and the Critic," in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 31–53, though I would want to nuance his notion of "constraints."

61. Thomas R. Hatina has warned of the inherent ideological context of the development of intertextuality itself in poststructural linguistic thinking, Marxist political thought, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. He cautions biblical scholars who engage in "intertextual readings" that doing so they implicitly accept what he considers radical conclusions of this text theory with regard to meaning, centrality, and reference. More often then not, as he rightly points out, these scholars are really doing a version of source criticism or study of influences without taking on the bigger issues. See Thomas R. Hatina, "Intertextuality and Historical Criticism in New Testament Studies: Is There a Relationship," *Biblical Interpretation* 7, no. 1 (1999): 28–43.

62. Paraphrasing Ricoeur, "Interpretive Narrative," in *Figuring the Sacred*, 181.

world: transformation, integration, violation, transgression, imitation, suppression, transposition of intertexts.[63]

Kristeva's notion of intertextuality has been criticized as having inscribed the reader or writer into a text in a way that could negate the transformational or reflexive process.[64] Or conversely, the notion of intertextuality is read as intending to subsume all meaning in a closed, intralinguistic system. However, Kristeva's notion of intertextuality seeks to exclude these notions (and explains her abandonment of the term when others apply it to such notions). Kristeva's intertextuality seeks to "decenter the closed set and elaborate the dialectics of a process within plural and heterogeneous universes."[65] Kristeva is very concerned about the status of the subject and its relation to the body, to others, and to the world:

> If there exists a "discourse" which is not a mere depository of thin linguistic layers, an archive of structures, of the testimony of a withdrawn body, and is, instead, the essential element of a practice involving the sum of unconscious, subjective, and social relations in gestures of confrontation and appropriation, destruction, and construction—productive violence, in short—it is "literature," or, more specifically, the *text*.[66]

These cautions issued by Kristeva are particularly relevant for the study of literary genres that suggest performance and liturgical texts that anticipate performance. Kristevan text

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63. This notion of the text deautonomizes the text and decenters meaning in a text. In this reconception, decentering is "part of a continuous revolution at the site of language" that makes it a work of ideological transformation. (See Tilottama Rajan, "Intertextuality and the Subject of Reading/Writing," in Clayton and Rothstein, 64).

64. See Rajan, "Intertextuality and the Subject," who critiques and corrects Kristeva's theory by extrapolating the concept of the *lector* (akin to Barthes's *scriptor*).

65. *Revolution*, 14.

66. *Revolution*, 16.

theory keeps in tension the relationship of the text to the body, to others, and to the world. It also alerts the interpreter that the relations in a text are not neutral, but have the potential to be destructive as well as constructive. This will become clear when I consider the invective against the Jews allied with the descent motif in the East Syrian liturgical tradition.

ORGANIZATION

This dissertation will proceed in the following manner. Chapter two will take up the depictions of Sheol and the descent to Sheol in the Syriac Bible known as the Peshitta. It will use the major genres of Scripture as a strategy for organizing and interpreting the material. The goal of the chapter is to project a "biblical horizon of expectations" from within which the literary texts are fashioned. From the diverse uses of Sheol and descent imagery in both testaments, I identify certain itineraries of meaning set out according to genric strategies that in effect become a trajectory to the literary development.

Chapter three presents the writings of the Syriac literary tradition as the extant literature takes up the trajectory of images, metaphors, and events of the Bible. The literary works reinscribe these elements in specific genres to mediate to a particular community what faith in the Pasch of Christ means. The chapter is organized chronologically, delineating an early literary tradition (second to fourth centuries of the Common Era) and the golden period (fourth to seventh centuries of the Common Era).

The latter period is further divided into two sections: the first treats the fourth century, and the second section from the fifth to seventh centuries. This division is warranted by the shifts in christology and ecclesiastical politics. The writings are arranged according to the authors to whom they are ascribed and organized by particular genric manifestation.

Having set out and assessed the motif in the literary tradition, chapter four examines how the East Syrian liturgy employs the descent motif through an examination of the liturgies for Great Saturday of the Pasch and the Sunday of the Resurrection, Epiphany, and the mysteries of baptism and eucharist. While the eucharistic liturgy is the central act of worship in the East Syrian rite, the public celebration of the liturgy of the hours, including a night vigil, is a vital element of liturgical observance. There is an observable contrast between the literary and liturgical traditions' presentations of the descent to Sheol. While the literary tradition has an expansive narrative development of the descent that eventually becomes becomes sedimented, the liturgy draws selectively key points and reconfigures them in its various genres ordered to the praise and invocation of God. The liturgical tradition represents a certain breaking of the elements of the motif so that they can be refigured to speak in a new way in the liturgical context. The motif takes on a new density given the overlapping and intersecting of genres that contribute an expressive relation among text, word, and community.

The final chapter moves to a more theoretical account of the intersection and interweaving of discourses in liturgy, taking the East Syrian liturgy's deployment of the descent motif as the point of departure and case in point. Here, I will account for what will be termed the 'appropriation' of the descent motif by the East Syrian liturgy and offer

a systematic reflection on the character of liturgical language and rhetorical strategies that emerge from the particular case of these liturgies. I will also probe theological issues raised by this exploration of the descent motif and show how the liturgical appropriation of the motif also contributes to the Syriac theological tradition.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL HORIZON

Reflecting on the distinctive character of early Syriac Christianity, Syriac scholar Sebastian Brock observes that it "can justly be described as the product of a creative and fruitful meditation upon Scripture."[1] The Syriac Christians based themselves firmly in Scripture. Before I take up the contours, strategies, and developments of the descent theme in the early Syriac literary tradition, I attend to what is set out in the Scriptures, since the Bible is a constitutive element of the literary tradition. The Syriac writers had an extraordinary command of the Scriptures. To engage their world view is to engage a biblical world view. The difficulty for scholars is that the origins and early history of the Syriac versions of this Scripture are obscure. Exactly what they had available to them remains a matter of conjecture. Moreover, the Syriac translations of the Old Testament offer distinct readings of the Hebrew Masoretic text and the Septuagint. The main gospel text in use was a harmony of the four canonical Gospels, and some New Testament texts in what would come to be the western canon were not part of the Syriac canon until a later period. The

1. Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, Mich.,: Cistercian Publications, 1987), xxxiii.

distinctive quality of the Syriac Scriptures also stems from their significant appropriation of Jewish traditions and contact with Jewish apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. The Syriac versions, thus, are the product of the interaction of several types of discourse.

This chapter will first briefly outline the history of the biblical texts in the Syriac-speaking world and consider the particular problems for interpretation its distinctive character poses. Then I will take up the depictions of Sheol and descent into Sheol in the Syriac Bible known as the Peshitta.[2] I will use the major genres of the Scripture as a strategy of organizing and interpreting these significant references and discern the content and shifts of biblical imagery. I will then identify the cumulative impact of the imagery of Sheol to propose trajectories or itineraries of biblical meaning that the literary tradition takes up in a privileged way.

THE SYRIAC BIBLE

The name given since the ninth century to the Bible in Syriac translation is *Peshitta.*[3]

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2. I do not intend an exegesis of the relevant biblical texts nor a reading that privileges the hypothetical reconstruction of "original readings." Rather, I will examine texts as they are assembled into the limits of a frame called "the Bible," constituting a network of intersignification.

3. In Syriac the word ܦܫܝܛܬܐ means "simple,""common," or "ordinary"(see J. Payne Smith, ed., *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary founded upon the* Thesaurus Syriacus *of R. Payne Smith, D.D.*, (1903; reprint, Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), s.v. ܦܫܛ). The word derives from the verb ܦܫܛ, meaning "to stretch out"or "extend," which some have taken to imply a degree of interpretation of the original text in the work of translation. This is by no means a majority opinion. Others take the term to refer to the "ordinary" version of the people as opposed to the Syrohexaplaric version (slavish translation from Greek ca. 615). Still others see it as the "simple" version as opposed to more paraphrastic translations. See the discussion and sources in Peter B. Dirksen, "The Old Testament Peshitta," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder (Assen, Maastricht, and Philadelphia, Pa.: Van Gorcum and Fortress, 1990), 256. Also, in some contexts the term *peshitta* is reserved for the later versions of the Bible in

The earliest manuscripts of the Peshitta date from the fifth century, but incidental citations in Ephraem and Aphrahat allow scholars to conclude that the Syriac Old Testament (OT) "had been created in the 1st or 2nd century [of the common era]."[4] These incidental citations are all that survive of the earliest versions, what some biblical scholars refer to as the Old Syriac version. However, by no means did Syriac writers have a single standard text or version. Rather, they attest to the presence of a plurality of texts and a variety of readings.[5] I will consider the textual history of the Syriac OT and New Testament (NT) separately since they were separate undertakings and provide a pertinent example of a distinctive Syriac reading.

Old Testament

Biblical scholars trace the roots of the translations of the OT into Syriac back to the oral and written Aramaic targums from the flourishing Aramaic-speaking Jewish communities in the region of Adiabene (see the map in appendix 2). The Jews undertook oral and written translations *(targumin)* of the Hebrew Scriptures for expository and liturgical purposes when Hebrew declined as a spoken language. Most scholars see the Syriac

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Syriac, rather than used as a term for the Syriac Vulgate in general. In this case the earlier versions are designated "Old Syriac."

4. Lucas van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, in cooperation with C. Brekelmans and M. Haran, ed. Magne Saebø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), 1:614. Anton Baumstark gives a brief survey in his *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Webers Verlag, 1922; W. de Gruyter, 1968), 23–27. See also Sebastian Brock, "The Peshitta Old Testament: Between Judaism and Christianity," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 19 (1998): 483–502.

5. Van Rompay, 614–615.

translations as a continuation of this interpretive genre of targum.[6]

The Syriac translation of the OT draws from the "nutritive matter of the Jewish religious heritage,"[7] but is also attentive to the style and idiom of Syriac, which makes it distinct from the Septuagint (LXX) and Masoretic Hebrew text (MT). While scholars agree that the Hebrew text reflected in the Peshitta is very close to the MT, there are a number of places "where the Peshitta together with the LXX, the targum(s), or both, perhaps even alone, may well reflect a text different from the MT."[8] Because translators and copyists sought a more dynamic translation of the Hebrew making free use of Syriac idiom and style, the Peshitta text, also, is not a slavish rendering of a Hebrew *Vorlage*. Moreover, the Peshitta text has appropriated Jewish exegetical traditions and the targums, giving the Peshitta text distinctive characteristics and readings that vary from the MT and LXX.[9]

Syriac scholars have shown that in the earliest translations and transmission of the Syriac OT books, there are many readings that are originally closer to the targumic tradition that would have been known to the early writers. In many cases these readings are no longer

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6. See the brief account and relevant bibliography in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* [hereafter NJBC], ed. Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), s.v. "Texts and Versions," by R. E. Brown, D. W. Johnson, and K. G. O'Connell, nos. 103–107 and 116. See also Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 8–10 and 18–20.

7. Dirksen, 295.

8. Dirksen, 259.

9. Michael Perry Weitzman argues for a Jewish origin of the Syriac OT in the Edessa region, ca. A.D. 150–200. He makes the case that the Peshitta is a constrained, literal translation of the consonantal Hebrew text, though the translators were aware of the reading tradition and the *targumin*. See *The Syriac Versions of the Old Testament: An Introduction*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

found in the extant Peshitta text. In other cases the Jewish midrashic traditions absent from the targums have been incorporated into the actual Syriac translations.[10]

In addition to the influence of Jewish tradition, the Peshitta is "not the work of one hand, but of many hands, and each translator had his own way of going about his task."[11] Whether these translations originated exclusively in Jewish communities or Christian communities and in either wholly or partly remains an open and still debated question.[12] Readings may also have been adjusted and additional books added according to the LXX, perhaps at the hands of the translator or later copyists.

New Testament

The Greek NT texts were translated into Syriac and in the beginning circulated separately from the OT. With regard to the Gospels, the most popular and widely used version was a harmony of the four Gospels—Tatian's *Diatessaron*. The Diatessaron was a popular version of the Gospels of the Church of Edessa until the fifth century. Tatian, born ca. A.D. 110 and hailing from "land of the Assyrians" (either Syria or Mesopotamia), was a disciple of Justin Martyr.[13] He left Rome and returned to the East sometime after A.D. 165. At this time he composed the harmony, perhaps originally in Greek, as its title might suggest.

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10. See Sebastian Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 212–223; and Robert Murray, *Symbols*, 280–288, for specific examples and sources.

11. Dirksen, 260.

12. See the extended presentation of the *status quaestionis*—particularly with regard to the Peshitta Pentateuch—by Dirksen, 261–285.

13. In his words, μὲν ἐν τῇ τῶν ᾽Ασσυρίων γῇ. See *Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments*, ed. and trans. Molly Whittaker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

Tatian meticulously selected and arranged the parallel material from the four Gospels in basically chronological order. However, very soon after the Greek, a Syriac translation was "prepared with liturgical and missionary intent for his native people."[14] When Tatian was suspected of heresy, the Diatessaron was replaced by a Syriac translation of the four Gospels, and all copies of the Diatessaron perished.[15] Ephraem's commentary on the Diatessaron, as will be seen, is a major witness for conjecturing its contents. There is also evidence that at the same time there was a Syriac translation of each Gospel separately, which may well have been known to the early authors as well.[16]

The remaining books of the New Testament were translated from Greek to Syriac, with the exception of Revelation, and 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude, which were translated

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14. *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino and trans. Adrian Walford (New York: Oxford, 1992), s.v. "Diatessaron," by F. Bogliani. See the studies by William L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); L. Leloir, "Le Diatessaron de Tatien," *Orient Syrien* 1 (1956): 208–231, 313–334, and his extended study *Le Témoinage d'Éphrem sur le* Diatessaron, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium [hereafter CSCO] 227, subsidia 19 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1962); Baumstark, 19–21; A. Vööbus, *Studies in the History of the Gospel Text in Syriac*, CSCO 128, subsidia 3 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1951); and idem, *Early Versions of the Gospel* (Stockholm, 1954), 22–23. See also the summary in Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, Journal of Semitic Studies Supplements 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3–9.

15. Theodoret of Cyr (423–457) called for the four Gospels to replace the Diatessaron, some two hundred copies of which he had destroyed. See William Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature*, 2d revised and enlarged edition (Amsterdam: Philo, 1966), 9; Dirksen, 261; and NJBC, 68:123. On Tatian's theology, see Han J. W. Drijvers, "East of Antioch: Forces and Structures in the Development of Early Syriac Theology," in *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 7–9.

16. Known in Syriac literally as the "Gospel of the Separate" (ܐܘܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܕܡܦܪܫܐ) as opposed to the "Gospel of the Mixed" (ܐܘܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܕܡܚܠܛܐ), as the Diatessaron was known. The two surviving versions of the old Syriac separate Gospels are the Curetonian (see F. Crawford Burkitt, *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe: The Curetonian Version of the Four Gospels* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904], vol. 1.) and the Sinaiticus (Agnes Smith Lewis, *The Old Syriac Gospels* [London, 1910]). See also Baumstark, 21–23.

and added at a later period.[17] The Peshitta text that is transmitted from the fifth century represents the compilation and reworking of the older strands of Syriac versions. While previously the division of the textual tradition into eastern and western streams was thought to mark confessional and geographic particularities, this division into isolated branches has been challenged.[18] While the Peshitta text of today is judged overall to have been rather faithfully and precisely transmitted,[19] the extant text does not necessarily reflect the older versions.

An example of the confluence of traditions and textual versions that raises an exegetical question of particular relevance to this study on the descent is the reading of Matthew 16:18. The current Peshitta version reads: "... on this rock I will build my church, and the gates (*wtar'ê*) of Sheol (*dashyôl*) will not prevail over her (*lâ neḥsnônāh*)."[20] It has

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17. See Wright, 6; Baumstark, 73–74; and NJBC's list at 68:126. See also Jeffrey S. Silker, "The Canonical Status of the Catholic Epistles in the Syriac New Testament," *Journal of Theological Studies, N.S.* 38 (1987): 311–329. Murray claims that at first 1 Peter was not part of the Syriac 'canon' either (20–21), but he seems alone on this position.

18. See Dirksen, 258. The Peshitta Institute of Leiden has been preparing a critical edition of the books of the OT Peshitta since 1972.

19. See NJBC, 68:123.

20. ܘܥܠ ܗܕܐ ܟܐܦܐ ܐܒܢܝܗ ܠܥܕܬܝ ܘܬܪܥܐ ܕܫܝܘܠ ܠܐ ܢܚܣܢܘܢܗ. For comparison, the Greek also reads "gates": καὶ πύλαι ᾅδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς (*Greek-English New Testament*, 2d revised ed., ed. K. Aland et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985). For a discussion of the relevance of variant readings for the task of interpretation, see Alexander Rofé, "The Historical Significance of Secondary Readings," in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. C. Evans and S. Talmon (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 393–402.

This particular verse has puzzled many exegetes, who try to understand why the gates would become active. The usual solution is to take "gates" as a metonym for the "gate keepers." However, Samuel Terrien ("The Metaphor of the Rock in Biblical Theology," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy Beal [Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 1998], 166–171) has argued that the problem is the verb κατισχύω. In the LXX it translates sixteen different

been long been observed, based on quotations and allusions to Matthew 16:18 in early Syriac literature, that the Syriac Diatessaron version originally read "bars (*mûklê*) of Sheol" not "gates of Sheol."[21] Subsequent publication of the Syriac version of Ephraem's Commentary on the Diatessaron confirmed this.[22] Why was "bars" introduced when "gates" was a familiar OT tradition and "bars" has no exact parallel?[23] Robert Murray saw this as a conscious desire to link Matthew 16:18 to Psalm 106:16 and Isaiah 45:2, precisely because these two passages were associated with the descent to Sheol in the Syriac tradition, while the expression "gates of Sheol" might be perceived as a too general allusion to simply "death."[24] The biblical imagery itself echoes Near Eastern mythology where gates or some fortified entrance play a

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Hebrew verbs, among them verbs whose semantic range is "to stand firm, to be inflexible, to be heavy." Thus, he says, the gates are actually passive and inactive. They will not resist the Christian community. That is to say, the *logion* is a prophetic pronouncement that the Church does not have an unconquerable permanence but must persevere in strong faith, which threatens Sheol. The Syriac verb (ܥܫܢ) translates the Greek. I have rendered the verb as pointed in the *p 'al*, thus "to subdue" or "to prevail over." But Costaz also gives "to resist" (Louis Costaz, *Dictionnaire Syriaque-Français/Syriac-English Dictionary/Qamus Suryani-Arabi* [Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1963], s.v. ܥܫܢ). It could also be pointed as a *pa'el* and translated "to strengthen," "to fortify" or "to show oneself strong." The Peshitta text could thus conceivably support Terrien's argument that the verse could be understood, "And the gates will not strengthen against it."

21. F. C. Burkitt, *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe* (Cambridge, 1904), 1:92–93 and S. *Ephraim's Quotations from the Gospels* (Cambridge, 1901; Nendeln, 1967), 30.

22. L. Leloir, ed. and trans., *Saint Éphrem. Commentaire de L'Évangile concordant. Texte syriaque (Manuscrit Chester Beatty 709)*, Chester Beatty Monographs 8 (Dublin: Hodges Figgis and Co., Ltd., 1963). The Armenian reads դրունք "[outer] gates" like the extant Peshitta and the Latin and Greek manuscript tradition. L. Leloir, ed., *Saint Éphrem. Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant, version arménienne*, CSCO 137 (Louvain: Orientaliste, 1953), section 14, no. 1.

23. I am following the discussion in Sebastian Brock, "The Gates/Bars of Sheol Revisited," in *Sayings of Jesus: Canonical and Non-Canonical. Essays in Honour of Tijtze Baarda*, ed. W. J. Petersen, J. S. Vos, and H. J. De Jonge, Supplement to Novum Testamentum 89 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 9–14.

24. Murray, 228–236; 324–329.

major role in the underworld.[25] Whether the gates and bars might relate as well to what the local community would have found at the entrance to its own city must remain in the realm of speculation. Whether this was part of the overall harmonizing of the gospel OT allusions and citations with the Old Syriac text, the influence of lost targumic tradition, or further adaptations on Tatian's part are additional questions. Sebastian Brock has argued that even though "'the bars' were (in all likelihood) introduced into Matthew 16:18 in order to provide a link with the Descent, not all Syriac writers necessarily interpreted the verse in that context."[26]

This example of the "bars" and "gates" variant in the Diatessaron highlights the complexity of the task of interpretation of the extant Syriac scriptures. While most scholars attend to the textual traces of Jewish traditions, the emergence of these texts from the public performance of liturgy and catechetical formation deserve further consideration as well. The interplay between scriptural proclamation and homiletic interpretation would no doubt in turn have effected the textual composition by drawing on available oral tradition and motifs.

APOCRYPHAL AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHAL LITERATURE

Scholars have also taken into consideration the extensive apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature of the intertestamental and early Christian era when investigating

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25. See Paul Dhorme, "Le séjour des morts chez les Babyloniens et les Hébreux," *Revue Biblique* 16 (1907): 58–78, and Arvid S. Kapelrud, "The Gates of Hell and the Guardian Angels of Paradise," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 70 (1950): 151–156, who surveys Sumerian and Assyrian texts.

26. Brock, "Gates/Bars,"17.

the formation of the early Syriac tradition. The problem again arises, however, of what was available to whom and when.[27] As Jean Daniélou has shown, there is certainly sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the descent theme was indeed prominent in the apocryphal traditions that contribute to and are shaped by the development of the Jewish-Christian belief.[28] However, Daniélou presents a homogeneous Jewish-Christianity, giving no attention to the specific locations, periods, languages, or stages of the tradition. Lucas van Rompay rightly points out: "While it is certainly useful to investigate further the parallels between Jewish and Syriac exegetical literature, the juxtaposition of passages will not suffice to explain the nature of the interrelationship between the texts."[29] A rather more fruitful way to approach these texts would be to see a mutual growth and interaction that at its heart is the continuance of the imagery and themes of local oral traditions. There is a continuity of relatively stable images that constitute elements of a tradition. The anthology commonly called 1 Enoch, the Apocalypse of Paul, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Ascension of Isaiah, and the Testament of Abraham, for example, witness to the popularity in both Jewish and Christian writings of the apocalyptic form of the "tours of hell." In this genre, a visionary recounts a journey through the underworld, giving descriptions of what is seen and often

27. See Brock, "Jewish," 223–224; Van Rompay, 617; and Alain Desheumaux, "La Place des textes apocryphes dans la littérature syriaque," *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995): 61–72, who presents chronological stages of reception of various apocryphal books.

28. Jean Daniélou, *Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme* (Tournai, Belgium: Desclée and Co., 1958), 257–273. See also Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, Studies in Biblical Theology, second series, 17 (Naperville, Ill.: Alec Allenson, 1970), 58–62. See Baumstark's list of OT Apocrypha, 25–27.

29. Van Rompay, 617.

including an account of the fate of the dead.[30]

MESOPOTAMIAN AND MYTHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS

Without doubt the themes, imagery, and mythological motifs of the prior surrounding culture are woven into the biblical and early Syriac Christian texts. History of religions scholars and comparativist studies of the descent of Christ to Hell have demonstrated that the motif enjoys cross-cultural popularity.[31] These scholars have sought analogies for Christ's descent to Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and later Gnostic accounts of the netherworld and activity therein. These myths include the descent of a deity to the underworld, visitations by gods and heroes, and divine intervention for the dead. With regard to the Fertile Crescent, particularly relevant to the Syriac world view, there are many witnesses to ancient Babylonian mythology that include descent to the underworld. For example, the epic of Gilgamesh in its Sumerian and Akkadian recensions present the descent of Innana/Ishtar as a key motif.

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30. See Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). Her approach is chronological, in the effort to reconstruct this particular tradition.

31. The classic studies of the descent theme seek sources and analogies in ancient mythology. The representative scholarly expositions of the theme of Christ's descent are Josef Kroll, *Gott und Hölle: Der Mythos vom Descensuskampfe*, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg 20 (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1932); see 214–222, 183–204, 363–530 (though he does not use primary sources to treat Semitic material). See also *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1960), s.v. "Höllenabstieg Christi" by A. Grillmeier in the section "Religionsgeschichtliche Analoga"; Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1970), 60–68, 270–271; Werner Bieder, *Die Vorstellung von der Höllenfahrt Jesu Christi* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1949). John Arnott MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1930), even looks to Polynesia; see 2–20 *passim*. For a detailed, though perhaps dated, study of Roman and Greek mythology with marginal attention to the Christian development of the afterlife, see Franz Cumont, *Lux Perpetua* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1949).

Attempting to establish direct lines of influence, relationship, or dependence on Jewish and Mesopotamian sources is risky business, given the complexity of a text itself, as presented in the introduction. Furthermore, the language of *influence* carries with it often unchecked methodological presuppositions. If influence is conceived as unidirectional from a prior source to a more contemporary realization, the interpreter incurs the risk of closing off the text. Such allusions do not reinforce the authority of a prior tradition, but are traces that disclose the cultural and historical contingency of the text at hand. This "mosaic of quotations" opens the path to interpretation, rather than paralyzing the interpreter.[32] As Alan Bernstein cogently observes:

> In the arid lands from the Tigris and the Euphrates to the Mediterranean, there were a number of environmental and cultural factors shared by many people over more than a millennium. These mythic themes [of descent to the underworld], encountered by juxtaposing narratives about the underworld, at least represent options that could be known to neighbors, trading partners, even enemies (few cultural ties are closer than that between victor and vanquished), which could be borrowed or rejected, accented or muted—that is, when they were not spontaneous insights, the brainstorm of a poet, or generated out of local circumstances.[33]

Bernstein's observation emphasizes that the imagery and themes taken up in the particular local tradition respond to a popular interest or concern about the mysteries of the netherworld or the afterlife. The language and images are chosen in order to persuade a particular audience in a compelling fashion.

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32. The expression "mosaic of quotations" and the notion of its interpretive possibilities come from Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and the Novel," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.

33. Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 11.

The Biblical Web of Meaning

While not negating the interrelationship of the biblical with apocryphal and mythic intertexts, the Bible—imbricated as it is with mythic intertexts—comes to have the place of distinction for the developing literary and liturgical tradition. In light of the ambiguity, fluidity, and complexity of the biblical material, the critic should acknowledge that interpretation is already at work in the biblical texts themselves. Rather than attempt an archaeology of the original sources through further historical-critical explanation, I appeal to the textuality of the extant texts to keep interpretation to the fore. "The very fractured and unsystematic surface of the bible text is an encoding of its own intertextuality."[34] Gerald Bruns points out the:

> ancient hermeneutical insight [that] as the Rabbis, Augustine, and Luther knew, the Bible, despite its textual heterogeneity, can be read as a self-glossing book. . . . The parts are made to relate to one another reflexively. . . .[35]

In the Bible, the motif and imagery of descent to the underworld come together from a series of intersecting texts and snippets of texts of diverse origins and intentions. In turn, they are embedded in the diverse genric contexts of the Bible itself.[36] Genre is generative of

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34. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), 15.

35. Gerald Bruns, "Midrash and Allegory," in *Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Mass.: 1986), 626–627.

36. See Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1980), 75–90. For a brief account and assessment of the development of genre and form criticism and the relation between the two with regard to the Bible, see Mary Gerhart, *Genre Choices, Gender Questions* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 69–96.

meaning, not simply taxonomic.[37] By attending to the cumulative imagery and themes set out according to genres, the interpreter can set out the "itineraries of meaning" plotted in the biblical texts themselves.[38] The primary concern in this integrated enterprise is semantic, not historical or doctrinal. Before setting out the texts, some consideration is in order of technical terms for the realm of the dead that are used.

Some Termini Technici

Sheol

Before examining the biblical texts, two expressions in the Syriac Scriptures deserve comment because their nuance is lost in English translation. This is particularly the case when the word *hell*, of Germanic derivation, is used to speak about the place to which Christ descended. "Hell" has gained much freight in its development in Christianity as the place of eternal punishment and torment for the unrepentant sinner. In the Hebrew Scriptures the place to which the majority of the dead were consigned is *shᵉ ŏl*, borrowed and rendered in Syriac as *shyôl*.[39] In the LXX it is rendered *hadēs*. The NT blends the two terms.[40] The etymology of the Hebrew word is long disputed, though the shades of meaning tend toward

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37. On this understanding of genre, see Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975): 69–70.

38. The expression is from Ricoeur, "The Bible and the Imagination," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer and ed. Mark Wallace (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 149.

39. ܫܝܘܠ for שְׁאוֹל

40. See Bernstein's discussion, 139. He also points out that Jerome is generally consistent in translating *sheol* as *inferus* or *infernus* and *hades* as *infernus*, except in Matthew 16:18, where it is *inferus*.

desolation, deprivation, and even ruin.[41] In the earliest period of the tradition, Sheol was morally neutral, containing all the dead—good and evil—like a vast collective sepulcher.[42] However, it took on a variety of meanings, from a specific place with definable characteristics, to the inside of the earth, to a synonym for death.[43] Later on, notably in Ezekiel, there comes to be segregation in Sheol, with distinct places for the upright and the unrighteous.[44] Further depictions of those dwelling in Sheol suggest that they are like "shadows" or "shades" and are cut off from worship and the acts of God, though God's omnipotence reaches to Sheol (see Is 38:18; Ps 6:6; 88:4; Am 9:2; Ps 139:8). Sheol can also infringe on the living, notably those in distress, imprisonment, and illness (see especially Jon 2:3 and Ps 16:10; 30:4).[45] Contemporaneous with the development of the concept of Sheol is the development of the concept of Gehenna as a place of pain and banishment. Gehenna was a known geographical place where sacrificial bodies had been buried (Jer 7:31–32; 19:4) and executed criminals were disposed. Because of these ignominious dead, Gehenna assimilates to itself the ideas of final torment. Gehenna, not Sheol, was the place of severe

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41. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* [hereafter TLOT], ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), s.v. "*šᵉʾôl* realm of the dead," by G. Gerleman.

42. See Bernstein, 138–141, and Nicholas Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), chapter 6.

43. Bernstein, 140.

44. As Bernstein says, "Sheol gets a map" (165). The lowest part of Sheol is known as *Abaddon*. People assigned here are worse off, being the furthest removed from the land of the living.

45. See also Gerleman in *Theological Lexicon*.

punishment.[46]

The Expression *men bêt mîtê*

In the Greek NT, the expression *ek nekrôn* or *apo tôn nekrôn* ("from the dead") is used to speak of Christ's (or some other's) resurrection (see, inter alia, Mt 27:64; 28:7; Mk 9:10; Lk 9:7; 20:35; 24:46; Jn 2:22, 12:1,9,17; 21:14; Acts 3:15; 4:2, 10; 10:41). There is a subtle semantic distinction in the Greek prepositions, with *apo* meaning "from" in the sense of "away from" and *ek* meaning "from" in the sense "out of." In Syriac, both expressions are rendered by the preposition *men*. A particularity of Syriac idiom, however, is the use of the term *bêt mîtê* for *nekroi*. Literally, the expression *men bêt mîtê* means "from the place-of the dead." However, the spatial dimensions of *bêt mîtê* is attenuated in English, usually rendered as "from the dead" or the more simply the "grave." In some cases, *bêt mîtê* is used as a synonym for "Sheol."[47]

I will now set out select passages organized according to the following major genric discourses of the Bible: narrative, hymnic, prophetic, wisdom, and paranetic. Since genre is the principle of organization, OT and NT texts that belong to a particular genre will be considered together. The criterion for selection of the text highlighted is the mention of Sheol or the place of the dead, or an account of someone's going to or coming from Sheol or some activity in it.[48]

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46. See Bernstein, 167–172. Sheol is also distinguished from the *tehôm*, or the watery Deep that constantly threatens the dry land in this mythic system.

47. Payne Smith, s.v. "ܒܝܬ."

48. All texts cited are my translations from the Peshitta, here ܟܬܒܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ (New York: United Bible Societies, 1979). The Old Testament of this edition is the ܟܬܒܐ ܕܕܝܬܩܐ ܥܬܝܩܬܐ, *Vetus*

Narrative Discourse

This section will examine Genesis 37, Numbers 16, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, and the Book of Jonah from the OT and Acts of the Apostles in the NT.

Genesis 37 recounts the first part of the Joseph story: Joseph's brothers conspire to kill him. After casting him into a cistern (an open pit that stored rain water), they choose not to kill him. Rather, some of the brothers sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites to take to Egypt. They feign his death and take his blood-soaked robe to their father, Jacob. Upon seeing the robe, he concludes that Joseph has been attacked by wild animals, and he goes into mourning. Jacob refuses to be consoled and declares, "'I will go down unto Sheol to my son, mourning.' And his father bewailed him" (Gn 37:35). Here the image of descending to Sheol is hyperbolic, expressing the depth of Jacob's sadness by underscoring the extent Jacob would go to embrace his son. Neither is there any indication that such a descent would bring solace to him.

In Numbers 16:30–32, during the revolt against Moses led by Korah, the Lord tells Moses that the Lord will consume the dissenters. Moses announces to the congregation that the sign that the Lord indeed sent him will be that the dissenters will not die a natural death but something new will happen. The Lord will cause the earth to open its mouth and swallow them, so that they go down living into Sheol. The focus of the narrative is proving the authenticity of Moses position in the face of the Levitical dissenters. Being sent living into Sheol is the "unnatural" sign that it has power. What is noteworthy is the personification of

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Testamentum Syriacae, eos tantum libros sistens, qui in canone hebraico habentur, etc. (London: B.F.B.S., 1823).

the earth opening its mouth to consume the living.

In 1 Samuel, when Saul goes to the medium to conjure up Samuel, the woman reports that she sees "spirits of the dead that are ascending from the earth," more precisely recognizing one of them as "an old man," whom Saul knew was Samuel (1 Sm 28:13). Samuel is not pleased that he has been disturbed (1 Sm 28:14). While this is an indirect reference to Sheol, taking it to be the place within the earth from which Samuel ascended, it shows that though dead, the righteous Samuel now dwelt in the place of dead. God would not listen to Saul, but perhaps Samuel would. The main narrative point of the passage is the announcement of the ultimate demise of Saul at the hands of the Philistines. The intervention of Samuel from the dead, with his memory of Saul's disobedience and his own prophetic word, reinforces the sense of desperation on Saul's part and his final efforts to convince God to aid him in battle. Of significance here is that Samuel is made to come *up* from below and is in some sort of preternatural or otherworldly state (one of the *ʾălāhê* "gods of the dead" [MT *ʾĕlōhîm*; LXX *theoi*] that the woman sees).[49] Though recognizable, those in Sheol are not in the same state as they were on earth.

In 1 Kings, David, his death approaching, calls his son Solomon to admonish him. David charges Solomon to do away with Joab (1 Kgs 2:1–9). David is clear: Joab is not to go down to Sheol in peace (1 Kgs 2:6). Moreover, Solomon is to send Shimei, who had cursed David, down to Sheol "by bloodshed" (1 Kgs 2:9). These rivals who had offended David will

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49. On the meaning of *elohim* here, see TLOT, s.v. "'elohîm," by W. H. Schmidt. See also Friedrich Nötscher, *Altorientalischer und alttestamentlicher Auferstehungsglauben* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 209, n. 1.The verse reads εἶπεν αὐτῷ θεοὺς ἑόρακα in the LXX. LXX text is from *Septuaginta*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

die. After his leaving this testament with Solomon, the narrative frame is closed by telling that David "slept with his fathers" (1 Kgs 2:10),[50] meaning simply that he died. However, it also evokes the image that in death David will join those who have gone before him in a peaceful repose. In this narrative, Sheol is the final disposition, the ultimate end of those who had wronged David. To send them to Sheol is the equivalent of a death sentence. Whether they would find the "sleep of David" is not certain, nor is it clear that David ended up in Sheol.

The literary form of the Book of Jonah is a prose narrative, which is why it is considered here even though Jonah is often classed as a latter prophet. Jonah's hymn in 2:2–10 will also be considered here because it is embedded in this narrative at a crucial juncture in the plot, and moreover 2:3 sets up an elaborate metaphor that depicts Jonah's descent into the deep as descent to Sheol. Jonah, resisting the Lord's call to go to Nineveh, tries to flee, but the Lord stirs up a tempest that rocks the boat in which Jonah tries to flee. When all seems lost, the sailors toss Jonah into the sea. The Lord sends a large fish that swallows Jonah, and he remains in the "bowels of the fish" (*bm'awhy dnûnâ*) three days and three nights. Jonah's hymn is embedded at this point, which rather than supplicating God, thanks God for delivering Jonah from the brink of death. Verse 11[51] recounts the intervention of God, who commanded the fish to disgorge Jonah. Literally, the fish "threw Jonah up on dry land" (*wpalṭeh lyawnān lyabshâ*).[52]

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50. ܫܟܒ ܕܘܝܕ ܥܡ ܐܒܗܘܗܝ.

51. The versification is different in the Peshitta. This is verse 10 in the NRSV.

52. ܦܠܛܗ ܠܝܘܢܢ ܠܝܒܫܐ

The intersection of narrative and hymnic material juxtaposes Jonah's past and current situation. When Jonah is thrown overboard, he sinks to the bottom of the deep: "To the depth of the mountains I descended, and the land shut its bolts (*sûkryeh*) in my face."[53] Jonah prays, "From the womb (*karsâ*) of Sheol I bellowed, and you heard my voice." The Lord sends the fish to his rescue to take him to dry land. Jonah speaks of his rescue in these terms: "You brought me up from destruction (*ḥbālê*), Lord my God."[54] There is a temporal gap in the narrative or a fusion of two instances of rescue. Jonah began to sink into the deep and the fish swallowed him. But the descent seems to have continued to the deep, and then the fish returns to the surface to spew Jonah out. Thus, Jonah's descent to the deep is a descent to Sheol, and the belly of the fish is actually a safe haven. Just as Jonah called out from Sheol, he now makes good on his vow to give thanks in the fish. The three days that it takes him to get from the womb of Sheol to dry land is an allusion to the typical length of a journey to the realm of the dead. This provokes the question whether Job's ultimate deliverance is from the depths to the fish's belly or from the fish's belly to dry land. The linking of these two events opens a metaphoric juxtaposition of the "insides" of the fish and the "insides" of Sheol. Moreover, the graphic digestive imagery of being swallowed and being spit out as if vomitus contrasts with the situation that Jonah is kept safe in the fish, which is acting at the Lord's command and bringing him to dry land. Jonah is called again, and this time obeys the Lord, preaching to and ultimately gaining the conversion of the Ninevites, despite Jonah's

53. ܘܐܪܥܐ ܐܚܕܬ ܣܘܟܪܝܗ ܒܐܦܝ̈

54. This could also read "up from the cords [of Sheol]" or perhaps "up from the pangs [of Sheol]" depending on vocalization of ܚܒ̈ܠܐ. But the expression "pangs of Sheol/cords of Sheol" seems to function as an idiom for "harm"or "destruction."

reluctance and displeasure with sparing the Assyrians. This is a final element of irony in the narrative: Jonah ends up doing what he resisted in the first place.

In the New Testament, Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost draws on the descent theme as central to his construal of the events of salvation in Christ (Acts 2:14–36). It appears embedded in a kerygmatic narrative. After Peter recalls that the Christ had been crucified and died, he declares that God has raised him up, "and loosened the pains of Sheol because it was impossible that he be taken captive by Sheol *(washrâ ḥeblêh dashyôl metul dlâ meshkḥâ hwāt dnetthed bāh bashyôl)* (Acts 2:24)."[55] Peter bolsters this declaration by appealing to David, and he cites Psalm 16:8–11 (in Acts 2:25–28), the crux of which is verse10, here Acts 2:27: "for you do not leave me in Sheol (*metul dlâ shābeq 'ant lnapshy bashyôl*).[56] He applies this extended quote further on in his discourse, asserting that in this verse David himself (whose tomb was there in Jerusalem) foresaw the resurrection, and indeed God had raised up this Jesus, to which the disciples witnessed. In Peter's preaching, it is clear that Jesus had died and gone to Sheol. What was outstanding was that, as promised, God did not abandon him to Sheol nor let Sheol keep him ensnared. Rather, incorruptible, Jesus was

55. ܘܫܪܐ ܚܶܒܠܶܗ ܕܫܝܘܠ : ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚܐ ܗܘܬ ܕܢܬܬܚܕ ܒܗ ܒܫܝܘܠ
This is how the text is pointed in this Peshitta version. It would make more sense to point *ḥablê*, and therefore "loosened (or even unfastened) the *cords* of Sheol." The Greek reads λύσας τὰς ὠδῖνας τοῦ θανάτου, καθότι οὐκ ἦν δυνατὸν κρατεῖσθαι αὐτὸν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ (ὠδίν= "birth pains," but also "pains, sufferings"; however, the verb λύω does not follow in that case either.) The root of the problem seems to be due to the LXX's confused translation of the Hebrew, which is carried over into the NT. For a survey of contemporary exegetical discussion, see A. T. Hanson, *The New Testament Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1980), 150–155. The NRSV reads, "having freed him from death because it was impossible for him to be held in its power." The RSV reads, "having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it."

56. ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܫܒܩ ܐܢܬ ܠܢܦܫܝ ܒܫܝܘܠ

raised up. Peter does make a point to say that Jesus ascended to heaven to the right hand of God, while David did not ascend to heaven. Being freed from Sheol is the central metaphor for the resurrection event in Peter's preaching.

Hymnic Discourse

Eight selected texts from the canticles and psalms will be examined to illustrate the way the motif operates in this genre.

Sheol figures prominently in canticles of praise (2 Sm 22:5–6, 1 Sm 2:6, Is 38) and in the psalms of praise and lament.[57] A life-threatening situation is expressed through the "snares and cords"of Sheol/Death. In 2 Samuel 22:5–6, David sings a hymn on the day of his deliverance. He remembers his dire situation in these terms:

> For the cords of death encompassed around me,
> And waves of unrighteousness tossed me.
> The cords of Sheol encircled me,
> And the snares of death were before me.[58]

The report of deliverance recounts that the Lord delivered him from a mighty enemy, though no further mention is made of Sheol. In Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:6, God is praised as the author of life and its taker. In a series of reversals, God is named as the one who kills and makes alive, the one who sends people down to Sheol and raises them up. In Isaiah 38:10–19, the song of Hezekiah, Hezekiah's battle with illness is cast as his being consigned to the "gate of Sheol (*tarʿâ dashyôl*)."

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57. See Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. K. Crim and R. Soulen (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1981). I will group communal and personal psalms of lament and praise together.

58. ܡܛܠ ܕܚܕܪܘܢܝ ܚܒ̈ܠܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ . ܘܓ̈ܠܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܠܚܘܢܝ
ܚܒ̈ܠܐ ܕܫܝܘܠ ܚܕܪܘܢܝ . ܘܩܕܡܘܢܝ ܦܚ̈ܘܗܝ ܕܡܘܬܐ

In the psalms, Sheol is invoked in two predominate situations: to speak of dire straits and to contrast the worship offered to God in the land of the living.[59] In Psalm 6:5, to go to Sheol is to be cut off from the ability to praise God. Psalm 88:10–12 is quite detailed. Sheol is dark and deep (88:6). To go to Sheol is to be forsaken, to have no help, and to be overwhelmed as if by the surging waves of a tempest (88:7). In a series of rhetorical questions the psalmist tries to convince God to help. Otherwise, there will be no possibility of making a vow of praise, because God seemingly does not do wonders for the dead, nor do the heroes praise God.[60] The wonders of God are not seen in the dark nor can God's past help be remembered in the land that has been forgotten (88:12). As in Psalm 114:17, the dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go to the darkness. God seems powerless with regard to Sheol's hold and distant from those within. This contrasts with Hannah's song where God remains powerful.

Sheol is also depicted as power to be reckoned with. In Psalm 89:48, the psalmist asks, "[Who] can deliver a person from the hand of Sheol?" No one who lives can escape death, and there is no help for those who go down (see 86:14). Death has cords (*ḥablê*), and Sheol has afflictions (*ʿûṣānê*). In 107:16 an act of deliverance is cast in terms of breaking the gates (*tarʿê*) of bronze and breaking down the bars (*mûklê*) of iron. The violent destruction of gates and bars, presumably of Sheol, implies that those trapped within will now be able to exit

59. The numeration of the Psalms in the Peshitta diverges from the MT and LXX. See appendix 1.

60. In Syriac, ܓܢܒܪ̈ܐ, the "heroes" or "mighty ones." These are the *rephaim*, the race of giants who inhabited the land of Canaan before the Hebrews. It is also rendered in English as the "shades of the dead."

freely.

Scholars have given particular exegetical attention to Psalm 24 because it appears in an influential western account of the descent to hell, namely the Gospel of Nicodemus, an expansion and compilation of the early Acts of Pilate. However, the Syriac recensions of the Gospel of Nicodemus, like the other eastern versions, did not have an account of the descent.[61] Verses 7 to 10 speak of the triumphal entry of the "King of glory" before whom gates are lifted high:

> Raise up your heads, O Gates! / Be raised up, O eternal Gates!
> Let the king of glory enter.
> Who is this king of glory? / The strong and mighty Lord, the mighty and warlike Lord.
> Raise up your heads, O Gates! / Be raised up, O eternal Gates!
> Let the king of glory enter.
> Who is this king of glory? / The Lord of hosts, that is to say, the Lord, glorious forever.

Some scholars have discerned a descent motif behind the psalm itself, even so much as a rather fanciful suggestion that the apostles would have prayed this psalm in the Temple or synagogue just before they received the news of the resurrection![62]

Prophetic Discourse

Two OT prophets—Isaiah and Ezekiel—and a prophetic statement ascribed to Jesus

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61. See the most recent studies in Zbigniew Izydorczyk, *The Medieval* Gospel of Nicodemus: *Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 158 (Tempe, Ariz.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997).

62. This is Allen Cabaniss's colorful but dubious position in "The Harrowing of Hell, Psalm 24, And Pliny the Younger: A Note," *Vigiliae Christianae* 7 (1953): 65–74, here 69. Against this, see Ernst Kähler, *Studien zum Te Deum und zur Geschichte des 24. Psalms in der alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 1958), 44–63. He argues (more convincingly in my opinion) that the oldest usage of this psalm is for a prophetic support of the ascension to heaven. See more recently Alan Cooper, "Ps 24:7-10: Mythology and Exegesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 37–60. He also suggests that v. 7 would best be translated "Raise your heads, O netherworld gates!" with "gates" understood as the "gatekeepers" (54).

in the NT will be considered here as representative of the descent motif in prophetic texts.

Sheol figures strongly in several passages from the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah.[63] In the so-called "song of the vineyard" in Isaiah 5, the image of Sheol is used to speak about the repercussions of disregard for the deeds of the Lord. Sheol is forcefully personified. It has an appetite and therefore must enlarge itself to make room for the scores of dead. It opens wide its mouth without end, able to devour the hordes that will be cast down (see Is 5:14–15). Isaiah 14 opens with the Lord addressing the ruler of Babylon. God will cut him down and send him down to Sheol. There, Sheol will be provoked and the leaders and kings of the nations will be roused up by Sheol when the Babylonian king enters (14:9). The condition of those is Sheol is one of being weak, of being laid low and dwelling in the depths (see 14:10, 15). In both of these passages, Sheol figures in the course of divine punishment, though it seems that both good and bad alike are in Sheol (see 14:18). To go down to Sheol is to be cut off from the realm of human living. It is a diminished state, and the thought of death brings mourning.

In a different context, Sheol or death appears in messianic visions, which prophesy the promise of true joy and salvation from God. Isaiah 25:7b announces God as the mighty one who can save people from mourning and death. The people will experience true joy because death will be "swallowed up in victory forever" (*wnetbalᶜ mawtâ lāzkû lᶜālmîn*) (25:7c). In Isaiah 26:19, another messianic vision, the Lord listens to the distress of the people. The prophet proclaims the promise of newness from God through images of sleep and

63. Acknowledging the customary historical-critical division of the book into three parts, I am concerned here with the whole frame of the prophetic book ascribed to the prophet Isaiah at a time when such a distinction would have been anachronistic.

light. In contrast to the situation of distress and despair, the victory will be God's, the sleepers in the dust will wake up and sing praise, the dead will live, and their corpses will rise (26:19). God's dew will illumine the deep darkness, and Sheol, the land of the Heroes, will expel its contents.[64] Sheol, an image of final demise, has its power broken in the saving action of God "on that day."

The destruction of Sheol is described in Isaiah 45:2, with the Lord's message to Cyrus, his anointed (*mshîḥâ*). Nations who resist Cyrus's entrance are enjoined to open their doors before him. Should this fail, the Lord can still wield a powerful arm: The Lord will break gates (*tarʿê*) and cut bars (*mûklê*), alluding to those of Sheol. God will aid Cyrus by laying low what is in his way and opening up to him what is closed in. Breaking gates and bars are signs of God's power and identity as God of Israel (see Is 45:3).

The Book of Ezekiel presents God's wrath against Tyre by announcing the laying waste of the city and a summoning the Deep to cover the ruined city with its waters (26:19–21). God will send its inhabitants down to the pit (*gûbâ*) where the people from of old are. The pit here functions as a synonym for Sheol. Effectively they will be cut off from the land of the living. Once more God emphasizes, "I will make you go down with those descending to the pit (*ʿam nāḥtay gûbâ*)." Further the prophecy identifies Sheol as the place of death to which God will cast the Egyptians (31:15–18). In allegorical fashion God speaks of the fate of Assyria, a "cedar of Lebanon" (31:3). When this "cedar of Lebanon" went to Sheol, God closed the deep over it and made the great waters to be restrained (31:15). The

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64. ܛܠܐ ܕܝܠܟ ܠܐܠܗܘ ܕܢܘܗܪܐ ܘܐܪܥܐ ܕܓܢܒܪܐ ܬܦܘܫ

fate of all was to end up in Sheol with it. The emphasis falls not only on the descent to Sheol, but the finality of the situation and the fortification of Sheol that underlines this finality.

However, what is closed will be opened in the Day of the Lord. In Ezekiel 37, the famous vision of the valley of the dry bones, the prophet is charged to tell the people the word of the Lord: "I will be opening up your graves and lifting you up from your graves" (Ezek 37:12). Here again, the messianic promise of deliverance extends even to the grave and is a sign of the extent of God's salvific power (Ezek 37:13). God is the one who will open the graves and pour the spirit out on the bones to make them living being once more. The fortification of Sheol will not withstand the intervention of God, whether imaged as living spirit or illuminating dew.

In the New Testament, the allusions or references to Sheol, few that they are, occur in the midst of prophetic or eschatological discourse. In Matthew 11:23, Jesus tells his listeners that what he has to say is "still more than the prophets."[65] Jesus invokes the day of judgment and tells the crowd that it will have been more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for their age. He admonishes: "Capernaum will not be exalted to heaven, but brought down to Sheol" (11:23). The prophetic-eschatological imagery is employed here to speak of the finality of divine judgement.

Jesus also compares himself to the situation of the prophet Jonah in Matthew 12:40, prophesying: "As Jonah was in the womb (*bkarseh*) of the fish three days and three nights, so

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65. The question whether this verse is an authentic Aramaic logion of Jesus or comes from the hand of the Matthean redactor is pertinent to historical-critical exegesis. This examination of the meaning and deployment of imagery and metaphors of Sheol does not necessitate validating the logion as *ipsissima verba Jesu*. Thus "Jesus says" in these paragraphs refers to a narrative voice, whether or not it could be authorial. In any case, the earliest readers ascribed it authorial force.

will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights" (Mt 12:40). This is the only sign that will be given to scribes and Pharisees. Jesus remarks that the people of Nineveh will also rise up to judge this generation, because they had repented at Jonah's preaching. The confluence of several aspects of Sheol imagery is at work in this short text. Jesus' three days in the "heart"of the earth is likened to Jonah's three days in the fish's womb, which are both metaphors for Sheol from the Old Testament tradition. However, Jesus, like Jonah, will be delivered from death, and the Ninevites will rise up as well.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus solicits a testimony of faith from Peter. The first time, Jesus calls him by his given name, "*shem'ûn breh dyawnâ.*" With the "Jonah" still resonating, he renames him "rock"[66] and declares, "I will build my church, and the gates of Sheol will not prevail over it."[67] Jonah's deliverance lurks behind this text, now transposed to speak of the Christian community. Sheol did not resist Jonah, and only God's intervention via the fish saved him. As noted above, there is an eschatological tone to the verse that suggests that only the steadfast faith of the Christian community can defeat a fortified Sheol.

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66. ܟܐܦܐ, as Peter is known in Syriac, is also the word for "rock." The Greek tries to capture the homonym with πέτρα/πέτρος. Terrien draws attention to the biblical world view in which "the rock" is the meeting point between earth and Sheol and the place where the Temple was erected. The Rock is the capstone that plugs and closes Sheol (166).

67. It has been suggested that the Diatessaron read, "will not prevail against you," as in Leloir's edition of the Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron, ܠܐ ܢܚܣܢܘܢܟ (14.1). Brock observes that there is "no Syriac evidence" in support of the proposed variant. Rather it is more plausible that the commentator is adapting the syntax to fit the compression of the verses. Brock, "Gates/Bars," 8, see also 8, n. 9. The Armenian version also reads "you": դրունք դժոխոց քեզ մի յաղթահարեսցեն (14.1 from Leloir, p. 185, ll. 15–16). The current Peshitta reading reflects the Greek οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς.

Wisdom Discourse

The Book of Job will serve here as an example of the deployment of Sheol imagery in wisdom discourse.

There is a further layering of the meaning of Sheol in the narrative of Job. In his reply to Bildad, Job laments in a hypothetical speech to God ("I will say to God . . .") that he wants God to leave him alone so that he can rest and refresh himself before he goes "to the land of darkness and the shadows of death, the land of loneliness, like an abyss and the shadows of death" (Jb 10:21). Though not explicitly named Sheol, Job has evoked the place of the dead. He will not be consoled in Sheol, which is characterized as a gloomy realm of deep darkness and loneliness.

Further on, Job reasons that perhaps he can escape the wrath of God by going to Sheol. He explains that human beings lie down to the sleep of death, and they do not rise up; they will not be awakened or roused from their sleep (Jb 14:12). He pleads with God in conclusion, "Oh that you would hide me in Sheol!" (14:13). Being in Sheol cuts one off from God's working in the world. However, Job suggests that God would still long for Job even if he were in Sheol and want to cover over his sin. In the end, though, Job protests that God destroys this hope (14:15–22).

After Eliphaz's second speech to Job, Job addresses God, affirming his innocence and describing his agonizing situation. At the end of his reply, Job questions if Sheol is all he has left, and if so, what hope there is for him (Jb 17:13–16). Finding no hope in looking to Sheol as a house, he wonders if he could find hope if he went even farther, to the bottom of Sheol. Again, he realizes that he seeks in vain. The plight of all mortals is to end up in Sheol, and

that is not a comforting end.

God's reply to Job affirms that Sheol is subject to God's omnipotence. God shut in the sea when it burst forth from the "womb" (*marbʿâ*), building "gates and bolts" (*tarʿê wsûkrê*) to hold it in. God asks Job, "Were the gates of death revealed to you, and did you see the gates of the deep darkness (or: shadows of death)?" (37:17).[68] Thus, Sheol and the deep are part of the mystery of God's creation. The Omnipotent One holds life and death and has charge over the heights and the depths.

Paranetic Discourse

The majority of New Testament references to the descent theme occur in paranetic discourse in the epistolary material. Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter will be examined here.

These passages have been the object of extensive exegetical examination in the efforts to ferret out an incipient "doctrine"of Christ's descent to hell. In the Pauline corpus several passages stand out with regard to the theme at hand. In Romans 10:6–7, Paul is urging the Israelites to accept that Christ is the end of the law and this brings righteousness to all who believe. To advance his argument, he cites Moses' address that the covenant has been revealed to human beings and is in their reach. They do not need to reach to the heavens to get it or cross the sea to retrieve it (Dt 30:11–14). In this passage, however, the allusion to

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68. This is a highly controverted passage because of the difference between the MT and the LXX (the Syriac reflects the MT). In the LXX the gatekeepers of Hades shudder (ἔπτηξαν). This reading found its way into western creedal formulae. See Rémi Gounelle, "Le frémissement des portiers de l'Enfer à la vue du Christ: Jb 38, 17b et trois symboles de foi des années 359-360," in *Le Livre de Job chez les Pères*, Cahiers de Biblia Patristica 5 (Strasbourg: Centre d'Analyse et de Documentation Patristique, 1996), 177–207.

Deuteronomy is transformed: The covenant is Christ himself, and no one needs to ascend to heaven to bring Christ down or ask "Who will descend to the abyss of Sheol and bring Christ up from the dead?" (Rom 10:7).[69] Paul continues that if women and men confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that "God raised him from the dead" (Rom 10:9), they will be saved. Of note here is the transposition: crossing the sea is now descent to the abyss in order to highlight the scope of salvific action of God. The profession of faith requires that a person believe that God raised Jesus from the place of the dead.

In 1 Corinthians 15:54, Paul's meditation on the general resurrection draws on two prophetic passages: "Death is swallowed up in victory. Where is your sting, Death? O! Where is your victory, Sheol?"(alluding to Is 15:8 and Hos 13:14). Paul conceptualizes the "sting" as sin, but the graphic imagery of a venomous bite or the digestive imagery of swallowing death reinforces in graphic terms the redemptive action wrought by God, the consummation of which will come at the end of time.

In an exhortation to the Ephesians to maintain the unity of the body of Christ, which is the Church—"one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph 4:5–6)—Paul speaks of the diversity of gifts given to Christians whose purpose is the building up of the body. He cites Psalm 68:18:

> Because of this it is said, "He ascended on high and he lead captivity away captive. And he gave gifts to human beings. Now, what is this "he ascended"? Only that he descended first of all to the lower regions of the earth. He who descended is also the one who ascended. (Eph 4:8-10a)

Exactly what is meant here has been the focus of many studies: Is this a descent to Sheol? Is

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69. ܘܡܢܘ ܢܚܬ ܠܬܗܘܡܐ ܕܫܝܘܠ : ܘܢܣܩ ܠܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܡܝ̈ܬܐ

this the descent at the incarnation? Is this the descent for the indwelling of the Spirit in the just?[70] Rhetorically the point is to locate the gifts given a Christian with the one Lord, one Spirit. Paul highlights the ascent in order to show that Christ descended. Even if it is an oblique reference to the descent to Sheol, the primary function of the passage to underscore charisms makes an appeal to the struggle motif of taking captives improbable. In 5:14 Paul cites a hymn that beckons the sleeper to awake and "rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Here the imagery of life from death and the illumination from Christ, quite possibly an allusion to baptism, is employed to draw home the point that the Christian must live in the light of upright living having been removed from darkness. While there is no clear reference to Sheol here, Christ's saving action for the sleeping dead is a new addition.

This notion of the saving activity of Christ on behalf of the dead forms the central question of another highly controverted passage, 1 Peter 3:18–20 (togther with 4:6).[71] The

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70. The most recent study is W. Hall Harris III, *The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7-11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1996). He gives a history of the interpretations both ancient and modern, 3–30. His own interpretation is that this refers to the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. He draws on targumic interpretation of Ps 68:19, Moses imagery, and the theology of the author of the Ephesians (whom he takes to be Paul).

71. See most recently Heinz-Jürgen Vogels, *Christi Abstieg ins Totenreich und das Läuterungsgericht an den Toten: eine bibeltheologische-dogmatische Untersuchung zum Glaubensartikel 'descendit ad inferos,'* Freiburger Theologische Studien 102 (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1976), 88–178. Markwart Herzog, *»Descensus ad Inferos« Eine religionsphilosophiche Untersuchung der Motive und Interpretationen mit besonderer Berücksichtingung der monographischen Literatur seit dem 16. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Josef Knecht, 1997), 40 ff.; and Hanson, 123–135. The best known studies are by William J. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6*, Analecta Biblica 23 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965); Bo Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of 1 Pet. III. 19 and its Context* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1946). Reicke appears to have a prejudice against the Syriac tradition, especially when he treats the witnesses to the verse in Syria: "As regards the interpretation of 1 Pet. iii. 19 by the provincial Assyrian Church, which cannot he said to have any great importance from the viewpoint of the central history of erudition. . . . (34). See also the studies by K. Gschwind, *Niederfahrt Christi in die*

context is an exhortation to persevere in doing good, even in the face of suffering. Speaking about Christ's suffering, the author explains: "And he preached to the persons (*lnapshātā*) who were shut up in Sheol, those who before did not obey in the days of Noah." The passage explains that the saving of the few in the ark during the flood is a type (*ṭûpsā*) of baptism, which saves the Christian through Christ Jesus. The gentiles, the author explains, will have to give an accounting to God for their immorality, because God judges both the living and the dead. For this reason, "good tidings were also brought to the dead" (*ȅstabar ᾿āp lmîtê*), so that they might live in the Spirit, having been judged in the flesh (1 Pt 4:6).

ASSESSMENT OF BIBLICAL WITNESS

This survey of how the imagery of Sheol is deployed in various modalities of biblical discourse leads to consideration of its cumulative impact. The imagery of Sheol shifts and collects meaning as it is taken up in the diverse genric contexts outlined above. The relationships among the texts accords a density to the Sheol imagery. A crucial border has been set up by the canonical designation of these books as the *bible*, delimitating a particular space in which an interplay of meaning and unfolding of signification takes place.[72] The meaning of the Sheol imagery is in fact often determined by the particular literary form that is employed.

All of the uses of Sheol in these texts are not neutral reproductions of a Near Eastern

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Unterwelt (Münster, 1911); Bieder, chapter 2, section 16; and MacCulloch, 50–66.

72. See Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophy and Religious Language," in *Figuring the Sacred*, 39.

cosmology. Rather, the mythic elements are redescribed in terms of the God of Israel, the God of Jesus. Sheol, or the underworld, is revealed to be part of God's creation, and in many instances God is able to control what transpires in Sheol. The righteous and sinner alike are consigned to Sheol at death, where they dwell in a sleep-like or diminished state. They are cut off from the presence of the Lord, subject to the destruction that comes in the grave, and this is little comfort to the living one.

In narrative discourse, the imagery of Sheol is a particularly convincing way to speak of the extremity of a situation. To go unto the depth of Sheol conveys profound mourning, to send someone to Sheol is to kill an enemy, to be taken to Sheol is to come face to face with one's mortality. To be swallowed up alive is an unnatural death that bespeaks divine intervention. In the narrative accounts, digestive imagery is assimilated and personification begins to emerge. The earth has a mouth to swallow, and in a extended metaphor the fish swallows Jonah, who dwells in its belly or womb, and is vomited up. These startling, almost repulsive images jar the reader precisely because they appeal to bodily functions, whether human or animal.

The imagery of Sheol is very pronounced in hymnic and prophetic discourse, where it acquires further contours. Sheol carries its associations with being in dire straits, but they are reinforced by personification and graphic struggle imagery. Sheol is a power who grips people in its hands, binds the unwilling captives in cords and snares, and then locks them away behind metal bars and gates. The digestive imagery is exploited to speak of the fate of those not faithful to God's covenant: A ravenous Sheol will devour hordes of human beings.

The prophetic texts extend the Sheol imagery to speak of the definitive intervention

of God on the "day of the Lord." Then God will victoriously conquer Sheol, breaking its barriers, opening it up, arousing the sleepers and illuminating the depths so that all its captives will be released. The NT draws on this prophetic use of the destruction of Sheol to speak of the ultimate victory of the Church through faith. Jesus himself, as Peter's preaching in Acts expounds, could not be held captive, and he loosened the hold of death on humankind.

Discussing the development of the descent of Christ, Markwart Herzog observes of the biblical evidence:

> It has become clear that there are biblical *starting points*, on which later histories of interpretation of the Decensus could be built. In the Bible are found real "spiritual seeds," which with certain justification could be further developed through reflection and imagination into what historically emerged as descent pieties in their varying forms.[73]

Examining the network of intersignification of the biblical texts in which the shifting imagery of Sheol occurs suggests that the biblical narratives provide more than "seeds." The collected imagery sets out itineraries of meaning that offer a clue to the way that the later writers might deploy the image.

Imagery of Sheol as a Strategy of Persuasion

The various narrative contexts of Sheol show that the imagery of Sheol, adapted and expanded according to the given situation, is a powerful strategy of persuasion, serving as a crisis or limit situation with which the current problem can be contrasted or compared. For

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73. Herzog, 58. "Es ist deutlich geworden, daß es biblische *Anknüpfungspunkte* gibt, auf denen die spätere Interpretationsgeschichte des Descensus aufbauen konnte. In der Schrift sind tatsälich ›geistige Keime‹ zu finden, die sich mit einem gewissen Recht durch Reflexion und Phantasie zu dem fortentwickeln lassen konnten, was historisch als Descensusfrömmigkeit in ihren unterschiedlichen Ausprägungen entstanden ist."

Jacob, his grief is such that he would even go to Sheol. For Job Sheol would be relief from the misery of the present. For Jonah, his resistence to God's call takes him to the brink of destruction: being consigned to the bowels of Sheol.

To persuade the audience of the futility of escaping Sheol, various texts extend the imagery of Sheol with jarring metaphors: Sheol is an insatiable creature devouring whole both living and dead; Sheol's hand clenches people and binds them in snares and cords. By intensifying the imagery, the audience realizes the finality of consignment to Sheol, the horror of being sent living to Sheol, the impossibility of escape. These heightened images also serve to demonstrate how powerful and persistent God is. In speaking of the utter newness of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and its import, the early kerygma of the apostolic Church emphasized that Sheol could not hold Jesus and that he rose up living.

Imagery of Sheol as Refiguration of Lived Time

The imagery of descent to and destruction of Sheol sets out a particular cosmic and poetic stance in the world. The term "cosmic stance" refers to the network of the human imagination where mythic symbols, images, and metaphors create a particular world view. This world view, in turn, is mediated through poetic works that structure this world view and invest it with a surplus of meaning.[74] The use of the imagery of Sheol interprets a projected future of the biblical community in terms of the ideal of human action in the present.[75] The

74. On the interrelationship of a cosmic and poetic stance, see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1984–88), 2:23.

75. See Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: From Husserl to Lyotard* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperCollinsAcademic, 1991), 154. See also Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3:190–192.

inevitability of the human person's descent to Sheol is exploited in two ways. First, if one does not abide by the covenant relationship or one defies the authority of God or God's messenger, the destruction, pangs, cords, and general travail of Sheol bespeak one's demise. In this context the world is for living faithfully and serving well. If not, one might as well be in the land of dead, cut off from the land of the living. Further, as in the case of Saul and Samuel, to call someone up from Sheol, that shadowy existence, requires one to face judgment in the present. Second, Sheol is invoked as a place where praise of God is not heard, the works of God not remembered, the wonders of God not seen. Thus, to be in the land of the living is the opposite: to praise God in the assembly, to remember God's works, to proclaim the wonder of God. Through the imagery of Sheol the texts set out what is expected of the community here and now.

Imagery of Sheol as Imaginative Construal of Divine Redemption

In the prophetic use of the imagery of Sheol, the imaginative power of language enables a new construal of God's definitive redemptive action for humankind. To speak of God's salvific action, God's omnipotence over death, God's definitive intervention in human living and dying and the new world possible because of it, the texts talk of the destruction of the gates and bars of Sheol, the illumination and awakening of the sleepers, the opening of graves, the coming up of people alive from Sheol. In NT paranetic examples, the central motif of preaching, that God raised Jesus from the place of the dead, is bolstered by images of the victory of God over this voracious Sheol. No longer then does Sheol or Death have power, but God alone. God will judge the living and the dead at the end time, and thus all must hear the good news of salvation that God wrought in Christ Jesus.

To speak of the ultimacy of God's redemptive activity, imagery of Sheol shifts from its personification and power to its demise and destruction. Moreover, the patriarchs and believers of ancient days are caught up in the eschatologically victorious action of God in Christ Jesus. Thus the sleeping dead can be illumined and awakened by the good news in order to share in what God has been accomplishing in the whole sweep of the economy of salvation.

These itineraries of meaning do not exhaust the potential of the imagery of Sheol as the literary tradition will demonstrate powerfully, but they do give some indication of the biblical horizon in which the writers worked. Questions that fascinated the Syriac exegetes were, for example, those of addressing and answering questions of biblical chronology, identity of biblical personages, and motives for divine or human actions; in short, "to solve questions to which the biblical text did not provide immediate or sufficient answers."[76]

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76. Van Rompay, 616.

CHAPTER 3
THE SYRIAC LITERARY TRADITION

As the community of faith takes up the foundational biblical narrative in worship and seeks to interpret its claims on them, the descent to Sheol passes from bare sketch to rich reconstrual of a literary motif through the "innovative force of poetic composition."[1] The writers of the Syriac literary tradition take up the scattered images, metaphors, and events of the Bible and reinscribe them in specific literary genres to mediate to a particular community what faith in the Pasch of Christ means and how it calls forth a lived response.

In this chapter, I will take up major extant witnesses of the Syriac literary tradition. I will proceed in a chronological fashion, making three divisions in the Syriac literary tradition. The first period runs from the earliest extant witnesses in the second century to the early fourth century. The second period is typically designated the "Golden Period," which runs from fourth to the seventh century. I have chosen to subdivide this period into two sections. The first covers the fourth century, and the second covers the fifth to seventh, so

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1. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1984–88), 1:54.

set off because of the shifts in christology and the reception of Chalcedonian doctrine by the Syriac-speaking churches.

Before taking up the literary material of the given period, I will sketch the historical, theological, and spiritual horizon of the period in which the genesis and reception of the literary texts takes place. These form, as explained in chapter 1, significant intertexts of the motif. Then, I will consider the major extant literary witnesses that take up the descent motif, attending once again to the genre and context of the texts, giving particular attention to any possible liturgical usage. These sections consist of exposition and assessment of the various witnesses. I do not intend an exhaustive report of every reference, but rather a survey of significant passages in the works of representative figures of the period. The final section of the chapter will evaluate the literary history of the descent motif to discern what emerges from a mix of narrative genres in diverse theological contexts and suggest what strategies influenced the development of the descent to Sheol in the Syriac literary tradition.

EARLIEST PERIOD: SECOND TO EARLY FOURTH CENTURY

Historical-Political Context

The Roman empire expanded its boundaries to the east, acquiring Syria, which became an imperial province in 27 B.C. Further campaigns extended the boundaries to the Euphrates River, which marked the boundary with the Parthian empire (see the map in appendix 2). This border was the site of turbulent political battles, and there were frequent invasions and regressions through the second century. Orshoene, with its capital Edessa,

became a client kingdom of Rome ca. A.D. 166. Rome took over Mesopotamia and made it a province, seized Nisibis, and went south to Babylon and Seleucia.[2] The roads that the Roman armies traveled were also the trade routes that linked Antioch in the west with Iran and India in the east. Moreover, goods also traveled from the Persian Gulf up through Babylon and along the Euphrates.[3] In the early third century, Ardahshir I of the Persian Sassanian dynasty conquered the Parthians and reigned as king from 226 to 241, when he was succeed by his son Shapur I (241–272). The Sassanid dynasty would reign for five hundred more years.[4] The eastern frontier of the Roman empire would remain a theater of war with frequent confrontations and continual battles with Rome. Christianity took root and traveled through these turbulent territories in the late Parthian era.

Many romantic stories of the origins and character of early Christianity in this turbulent, culturally complex, West-meets-East frontier have given way to more critically tenable theses of the development of Christianity in Mesopotamia. Such historically dubious accounts are well summarized in a caricature by Han J. W. Drijvers:

> [Syria,] an out-of-the-way place in the Roman Empire, with a local dialect very close to the language Jesus spoke, preserved and transmitted original and authentic Christian traditions going back to the circle of the disciples and the Jerusalem community, which in other parts of the Empire remained unknown or were lost. And all this was due to the activities of the

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2. See W. Stewart McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity to the Rise of Islam* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 3–6. See also the more detailed studies by J. M. Fiey, *Jalons pour une histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, CSCO 310, subsidia 36 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1970), 32–71; and M.-L. Chaumont, *La Christianisation de l'empire iranien des origines aux grandes persécutions du IV^e siècle*, CSCO 499, subsidia 80 (Louvain: Peeters, 1988), 1–51.

3. See Han J. W. Drijvers, "East of Antioch: Forces and Structures in the Development of Early Syriac Theology," in *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (London: Variourum Reprints, 1984), 1. See also McCullough, 7–8.

4. See McCullough, 38–39, and Chaumont, 54–98.

apostle Judas Thomas, Jesus' twin brother, and the enigmatic apostle Addai, whom Eusebius identified with Thaddaeus, one of the seventy.[5]

As Drijvers emphasizes, this fanciful account simply does not correlate with the available sources and historical data. The east Syrian and northern Mesopotamian region was thoroughly bilingual in Syriac and Greek. There was continuous exchange of diverse ideas as well as goods. The apostle Thomas did not bring the Gospel to that area. Rather the particular interpretation of the Gospel in that area focused for theological reasons on Judas-not-Iscariot as the Lord's twin brother. Addai represents the transformation of a Manichaen missionary.[6] The "forces and structures" of early Syriac-speaking Christianity, as Drijvers calls them, form a complex context within which the early Syriac literary tradition develops.

Theological Context

Not only was the political climate turbulent, but so was the flourishing intellectual tradition of the Syriac churches. Robert Murray characterizes the beginning of Edessene Christianity as taking place in a "confused welter of heretical gnostic elements."[7] Christianity grew in a milieu that was also certainly in contact with paganism and Zoroastrianism.[8] In addition to Tatian and the Diatessaron, three early figures—Marcion, Bar Dayṣān, and Mani—had a profound impact on the formulation and expression of the Christian faith by

5. Drijvers, 2.

6. A summary of Drijvers's arguments, 2–27.

7. Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 5.

8. See, for example, Murray, *Symbols*, 19.

the early Syriac Church.[9] Polemic against the followers of these thinkers would occupy writers even into the fourth century when they would come to be considered the heresies against which the "orthodox" faith must be defended.[10] Brief mention will be made here of the three major thinkers of lasting theological importance because a descent motif or resurrection problematic figured in some way in their thinking.

Marcion (d.160)

A wealthy ship owner, Marcion precipitated the first major crisis over the canon of Scripture. Marcion felt that he was preaching authentic Christian doctrine when he insisted that the God of the Christian Scriptures is the good and loving God who had saved humanity in Christ Jesus. This God was not the same petty and vengeful God of the Hebrew Scriptures who, though just, was a judge. In this light, Marcion insisted that the God and Father of Jesus Christ must be separated from the God of the Old Testament, where God is expressed in the law. Christians belong to another God, the God of love who forgives their sins through the Son. The Gospel of love (the New Testament) is the antithesis of the Law, which lead to Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament. He also upheld a rigorous asceticism and celibacy,

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9. These figures are highlighted by *The Chronicle of Edessa.* See *Chronica minora*, ed. Ignatius Guidi, CSCO 1 (Paris, 1908), 3.

10. Prior to the Council of Nicaea, strict lines between heterodoxy and orthodoxy cannot be drawn, particularly with regard to the early Syriac Church. Even when the orthodoxy of the Church had been defined in ecumenical council, Nicaea was slowly received in the Syriac world, and its Greek theology required adaptation and translation into indigenous Syriac theological expression. See Lucas von Rompay's remarks, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, in cooperation with C. Brekelmans and M. Haran, ed. Magne Saebø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), 1:619. See also H. J. W. Drijvers, "Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten syrischen Christentum," in *Symposium Syriacum 1972*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta [herafter OCA] 197 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1974), 291–308 (reprinted in *East of Antioch*).

to avoid the world of the creator God of the OT. Recent studies of Marcion have argued for his continuity with an albeit radical Pauline theology of law and grace.[11] Marcion considered himself an extension of Paul's missionary activity. His theology of a greater and lesser God and his rejection of the OT as a legitimation of the Christian faith made good sense in his situation.[12]

While care must be taken in using critics of Marcion as a source for his teaching, Eznik of Kołb, the classic fifth-century Armenian writer and bishop of Bagrewand, gave a résumé of Marcionite doctrine at the beginning of his refutation that has reference to the descent motif. Though written in Armenian at a later date, his account may well come from an earlier Syriac source, perhaps shared by Ephraem.[13] Following Eznik's account, Marcion (or at least later Marcionism) taught that the good God sent his Son into the midst of humanity in the form of a man. When the creator God saw him, he had him crucified. At his death, the son descended to hell in order to empty it out and bring the souls to his father in the third heaven. Since hell would not receive life into its mouth, the son went down dead.[14]

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11. See R. Joseph Hoffman, "How Then Know This Troublous Teacher? Further Reflections on Marcion and His Church," *Second Century* 6 (1987–88): 173–191; and idem, *Marcion on the Restitution of Christianity: An Essay on the Development of Radical Paulinist Theology in the Second Century* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984). See also Han J. W. Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria: Principles, Problems, Polemics," *Second Century* 6 (1987–88): 153–172.

12. See Hoffman, "How Then Know," 188–190.

13. C. S. C. Williams, "Eznik's Resumé of Marcionite Doctrine," *Journal of Theological Studies* 46 (1944–45): 66.

14. Armenian text in Williams, 68. Eznik explains that according to Marcionite teaching, Adam is cast into Gehenna (*ի գեհենն*) but Jesus dies and goes down *ի դժոխս* (to hell), which is where all the souls that Jesus leads out are. While the terms could be synonymous, it is likely that "Gehenna" refers to the farthest reaches of Hell/Sheol.

The appearance of the descent motif in the Marcionite system as well as in the expression of Christian faith attests to the early popularity of the image for expressing redemptive action.

Bar Dayṣān (d. 222)

A convert to Christianity in 179, Bar Dayṣān had a predilection for astrology. He attempted to integrate Jewish-Christian faith and Scripture with the dominant thinking of his day. Bar Dayṣān taught a doctrine of a spiritual resurrection in a bridal chamber of light, and so denied a final resurrection of the body. This doctrine is part of his overarching concept of the human being. For Bar Dayṣān, human beings are a triad of spirit, soul, and body and are subject to the fate of the stars. The spirit comes from God and is the seat of volition. The soul descends at the time of birth through various constellations that give it special characteristics. For Bar Dayṣān the world was created from the primordial elements of light, wind, fire, and water. His christology is not clearly set out, though later writers like Philoxenus of Mabug call him a docetist. Given that Bar Dayṣān was a native resident of the Edessene region and speaker of Syriac, he was quite popular, although whether he appealed more to the average folk or to the elite is debated. However, he is known as a hymn writer whose very popular works were sung and accompanied by instrument and served as a vehicle of his teaching.[15] Many have taken Bar Dayṣān as a gnostic, a Christian astrologer, or even

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15. On Bar Dayṣān, see H. W. J. Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan of Edessa*, Studia Semitica Neerlandica VI (Assen: Van Gocum, 1966); and the three essays in *East of Antioch*; Alberto Camplani, "Rivisitando Bardesane: Note sulle fonti siriache del bardesanismo e sulla sua collocazione storico-religiosa," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 19 (1998): 519–596. See also the summary in McCullough, 28–31. Specifically on Bar Dayṣān's hymnody, see Kathleen McVey's essay in *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers*, ed. G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 89 (Leuven: Peeters, 1999).

a heretical humanist. However, H. J. W. Drijvers's study of Bar Dayṣān demonstrates that there is no simple answer to who Bar Dayṣān was.[16]

Mani (d. ca. 276)

Born in 216 near Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Mani was an intellectual giant who created a syncretistic religion that drew on Marcionite Christianity, the teachings of Bar Dayṣān, and Zoroastrianism. As a youth Mani had a revelation from a heavenly twin (an angel or the Spirit), though not until after a second revelation in 242 did he preach a message of truth and healing of illness.[17] Mani was named "apostle of Jesus Christ" and took himself to be the promised Paraclete and mediator of all truth. He developed a radically dualistic doctrine centered at times on light and darkness. Part of his soteriology involved the "Father of Greatness" who sent "the Redeemer, Jesus of Judea, with a view to rescuing mankind by reclaiming the particles of light within them. This Jesus was only human in appearance."[18] The descent motif appears in the Manichaean psalm 196: "He opened the doors . . . The doors and bars *(mochlos)* of the men of Hades he broke."[19] Manichaeism was extremely compelling "precisely because it associated itself so closely with the existing local

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16. As noted by André de Halleux in his review of Drijvers's *Bardaiṣan* in *Le Muséon* 81 (1964): 273–274.

17. This brief account follows Drijvers, "Facts and Problems," 162–175, "The Odes of Solomon and the Psalms of Mani," 117–130, in *East of Antioch*; and MacCullough, 104–105. The best extended studies are by Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); and *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

18. McCullough, 104.

19. As cited and translated by A. F. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction—Text—Commentary*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 189–190.

traditions."[20] This would indicate that the descent theme was also an important part of these exisiting Syriac traditions.

Spiritual Context

One of the dominant spiritual features of early Syriac Christianity is its emphasis on asceticism. I take up asceticism because of its liturgical setting and its connection with participation in resurrected life. Given the roots and close association of the early Syriac Christians with Judaism, the ascetical impulse is remarkable, for "Judaism was not interested in asceticism."[21] Robert Murray describes Syriac Christianity's "enthusiasm for ascetical celibacy and renunciation of marital sexual relations" as its "most 'un-Jewish' feature."[22] The Old Testament and the rabbinic tradition are clear that "marriage and the marriage bed are blessed by God" even when "an all-male culture might perpetuate a literary genre of warning against women's wiles."[23]

Robert Murray explains that at its origins, Syrian asceticism "was nothing other than a continuation . . . of discipleship, taken by some as imitation, of the poor, homeless and celibate Jesus."[24] Tatian and Mani further witness to a pervasive ascetical climate in the

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20. Drijvers, "East of Antioch,"18.

21. Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, vol 1, *The Origin of Asceticism and Early Monasticism in Persia*, CSCO 184, subsidia 14 (Louvain: Secretériat du CorpusSCO, 1958), 14.

22. Murray, 11.

23. Murray, 12. Murray remarks that Babylonian rabbinism was anti-woman. He also points out that a Jewish critic of Aphrahat accused Christians of impurity because they took no wives. See note 1.

24. Robert Murray, "The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism," in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*, ed. Peter Brooks (London: S. C. M. Press,1975), 66.

second to third centuries. Tatian soon became a strong promoter of a rigorous asceticism, to which his theological scheme gave foundation.[25] Tatian's particular spiritual war, launched against sexual passion and worldly pleasure, was grounded in his idea of union with Christ, who was the single one, who was asexual. Christ exemplifies the original call of men.[26] Thus, salvation means becoming one with Christ, and therefore being celibate.[27] The point of this "command of the body and its passions" is "to create room for the divine spirit."[28] These ascetical impulses and convictions can also be discerned in the Diatessaron.[29] Mani's teachings, as well, enforced a harsh asceticism as part of the pursuit of truth "in the context of our rebellious and obstinate corporeal nature." He developed this view of the body into a radically dualistic doctrine.[30] It is important to note that this tradition, though developed into

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25. Drijvers, "East of Antioch," 7.

26. The role of a woman's configuration to Christ is not clear. Another avenue into this question is what theology of baptism was operative. Wayne Meeks calls attention to a primary symbol of salvation in the early churches, the unification of the opposites, especially the unification of the sexes. Christian baptism reverses Genesis 2:21–22. By putting on Christ or the new nature, Christians are renewed in the image of the Creator (cf. Col 3:10) and no longer divided into male and female. Baptism means restoring androgynous wholeness. Meeks also points out the bisexual image in Mandean and gnostic rites, where the androgynous state is recovered or renewed. Meeks does not consider the relationship between this androgynous state and celibacy. See Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13 (1974): 165–208.

27. Drijvers, "East of Antioch," 12–13.

28. Drijvers, "East of Antioch," 18.

29. See Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, 1:40–44.

30. Drijvers, "East of Antioch," 17, and also idem, "Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity," 168–169, 174.

an encratism, a strict and rigorous form of asceticism, is based not on hatred of the body but on the human being's return to an original state.[31]

The earliest witnesses of asceticism in the Syriac world emerge in the context of and reaction to a developing ascetical world view. In the past, scholarly accounts of asceticism in Syria have mistakenly ascribed late texts to earlier authors or read Syriac asceticism through the lens of the Byzantine concept of a monastic or hermit.[32] The originality of Syriac ascetical life and its organization emerges from careful reading of the native sources. But "even when earlier texts like the *Odes of Solomon* and *Acts of Judas Thomas* afford one some insight into the ascetical thinking of an earlier age, one almost always has to focus the scene in reference to what he has learned from Aphrahat and Ephraem, who are the primary witnesses to the institutions of their own day in Syria."[33] While Ephraem and Aphrahat criticized Manichaean encratism, they both enthusiastically supported the celibate life of

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31. See Drijvers, "Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity," 171. Sidney H. Griffith observes, "The earlier currents of ascetical thought in the Syriac-speaking world can best be studied in the history of the origins of Manichaeism." "Monks, «Singles», and «Sons of the Covenant». Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology," in *ΕΥΛΟΓΗΜΑ: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, S.J.*, ed. E. Carr, et al., Studia Anselmiana 110 (Analecta liturgica 17) (Rome: Sant'Anselmo, 1993), 154, n. 50. See also Vööbus's *History of Asceticism*, chapter 4 on the Manichaens.

32. See Sidney H. Griffith's correctives, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in *Asceticism*, ed. Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford, 1995), 220–223.

33. Griffith, "Monks," 154.

consecration to Christ, even though they also approved of marriage.[34] Marriage followed on a life of virginity that purified the lust of youth so that the marriage could be pure.[35]

Careful attention to the early Syrian ascetic vocabulary provides insight into the meaning and organization of ascetic life. The key terms are *îḥîdāyâ* and *bnay qyāmâ.*[36] The *îḥîdāyê* ("single ones") are not merely the religious celibates, but those who have a single spiritual purpose by entering into a special relationship with the "single one" or the "single (i.e., "only begotten," *monogenēs*) Son," Jesus. These single ones, "the ascetic *îḥîdāy[ê]* came to anticipate symbolically in the Church the situation of the paradise restored; [they] represented publically and liturgically humanity's response to the salvation offered them in the Incarnation (Passion, Death, Resurrection) of God's 'only Son.'"[37]

The *îḥîdāyê*, whether virgins *(btûlê)* or holy ones *(qadishê)*, had a particular social organization or membership in an order of believers called the *bnay qyāmâ,* best rendered in English as the "singles in God's service."[38] The Syriac term *qyāmâ* has conventionally been rendered as "covenant," but this too narrow translation has obscured the nature of the "sons

34. See Murray, 12.

35. See Shafiq Abouzayd, "Virginity in Aphrahat," *V Symposium Syriacum*, ed. René Lavenant, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 236 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute Press, 1990), 123–133.

36. This discussion follows the work of Sidney Griffith, "Asceticism," and "Monks." See also his "Singles in God's Service: Thoughts on the *Ihidaye* from the Works of Aphrahat and Ephraem the Syrian," *The Harp* 4 (1991):145–159.

37. Griffith, "Monks," 144.

38. See Griffith, "Monks," 158–160. *Btûlê* were male and female celibate virgins; *qadishê* were married people who had given up their married life.

and daughters of the covenant" as an ecclesiastical reality.[39] The verbal root *qwm* means "to rise" or "to stand." In the context of the early writings, the noun *qyāmâ* means not only "covenant" but "a stand," "a state," or even "a station" as in "a station in life," and infrequently "resurrection." Following the terminology used by Ephraem and Aphrahat, the *îḥîdāyê* have a certain station in life: "Much more than just a covenant or a pact of virginity or celibacy. . . . [T]hey stand for Christ, and for Christ they stand for the many, as Ephraem says."[40] They have an active role or "stance" in the Church as "living icons" of Paradise restored.[41] They "stand" like the "watchers" or angels engaged in the ceaseless heavenly worship.[42] They have risen like the risen Christ.

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39. What follows depends on Griffith, "Asceticism," 229–232. Narrow interpretation and translation that focused exclusively on the "covenant" aspect and that equated membership in the Church with being a daughter or son of the covenant contributed to the disputed thesis that celibacy was a requirement for baptism in the Syriac-speaking churches. This was first put forth by F. C. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity* (London, 1904) and later advanced by Vööbus, *Celibacy: A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (Stockholm, 1951) and *History of Asceticism* 1:93–95, 175–178. The best discussion is by Robert Murray, "Exhortation to the Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1974–75): 59–80 (see also Murray, *Symbols*, 14–17). A more fruitful line of inquiry is opened up by allowing a broader and contextual interpretation of *bnay qyāmâ*. See Griffith, "Asceticism," 230–231. What is more probable is that baptism would have marked the occasion when some enthusiastic, single, male and female Christians decided to become members of the *îḥîdāyûtâ* (Griffith, "Monks," 156). An interesting parallel is the integration of baptism and profession at the paschal vigil among the Pachomian cenobites. See Armand Veilleux, *La Liturgie dans le cénobitisme pachômien au quatrième siècle*, Studia Anselmiana 57 (Rome: Herder, 1968).

40. Griffith, "Asceticism," 233–234.

41. Griffith, "Asceticism," 234.

42. See Murray, 13. Vööbus speaks of their engagement in lengthy prayer; *History of Asceticism*, 1:124. On the origins and meaning of the *ʿîrâ*, see Murray, "Some Themes and Problems in Early Syriac Angelology," in *V Symposium Syriacum*, ed. René Lavenant, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 236 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute Press, 1990), 143–153.

The complex cultural and theological background and the pervasive ascetical sensibility with its liturgical and eschatological elements form a very distinctive context in which to read the diverse extant Syriac literary witnesses. The literature takes shape in a politically charged environment at the crossroads of Greek, Roman, and Persian cultures. The theological climate of the day was likewise turbulent, with Christianity vying for a stronghold amid popular movements that spoke the local language and associated themselves with local traditions. In the later period, the teachings of the followers of the central figures Mani, Bar Dayṣān, and Marcion remain in the forefront and elicit rebuttal and defense from the 'great Church' authors.[43] Concurrently, a strongly ascetic ethos pervades ecclesiastical life. The *bnay qyāmā* are living icons of the eschatological Paradise who are engaged in worship, manifesting humanity's full response to Christ's salvific Pasch. These theological and spiritual currents constitute the horizon in which the literary tradition develops and deploys its topics, images, themes, and genres.

The Early Literary Witnesses to the Descent Motif

The earliest extant Syriac sources that witness to the move of the descent motif from Bible to literature are enigmatic and controversial. This section will take up the key writings: the *Acts of Thomas*, the *Odes of Solomon*, the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the *Doctrina Addai*. Because of their controversial and enigmatic character, I will offer a brief introduction to

43. Because of the term *orthodox* can be at times anachronistic or ecclesiastically charged, I will employ the term 'great Church' to refer to the wider communion of Christian Churches in East and West.

situate them in the Syriac world. I will then give some consideration to their genres. I will explore representative passages that present the descent motif. Additionally I will take up early creedal formulations. I conclude this section with an assessment of the early witnesses.

Acts of Thomas

The *Acts of Thomas* was composed in the Edessene area in the first half of the third century. The Acts describe the activities of Judas Thomas, the twin brother of the Lord in the Syriac tradition, who went as an apostle to the East (Parthia). Han Drijvers has studied the Acts with an eye to articulating the relationship the text has with the theological and spiritual climate. He sees in Judas Thomas's breaking off of marriages and the frequent reference to the heavenly wedding feast (*gnônâ*) and other miracles a strongly Tatianic anthropology, theology, and terminology. In particular Drijvers highlights its encratism, its account of the origin of evil, its conception of salvation through union with Jesus, who is represented as the Spirit of the Lord.[44]

The Thomas literature, particular to the Syriac-speaking churches, derives from a theological construct of these churches. Judas Thomas is not a historical person, but "a theological person representing re-born man, born of God like the only begotten Son, his brother."[45] The *Acts of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, are in Drijvers's analysis, "an elaboration and illustration of the main elements of Tatian's christology and anthropology.

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44. Drijvers, "East of Antioch," 10–15. See also A. F. J. Klijn's introduction to *Acts of Thomas*, 34–37. He presents the dominant theme as the contrast between the corruptible and incorruptible.

45. Drijvers, "East of Antioch," 16.

. . . [Tatian] shaped the Judas Thomas traditions and literature like the *Odes of Solomon*, which in their turn polemicize against Marcion."[46]

References to the descent of Christ into Sheol figure in several passages in the Syriac *Acts of Thomas*, particularly in prayer formulae. One reference occurs in a prayer of Thomas in the bridal chamber (*gnônâ*) of the daughter of the king on the eve of her marriage. The prayer begins in a doxologic mode with a naming of names for Jesus (e.g., guide, refuge, hope, revealer, planter of the good tree). It then moves into a more explicit anamnesis of salvation history, which, after recollection of the incarnation, prays:

> And you showed the glory of your divinity through your steadfastness with our humanity when you overthrew the Evil One from his power and called with your voice to the dead and they lived.[47]

Further, asserting the omnipotence of Jesus, the prayer emphasizes:

> And you descended to Sheol and reached unto its furthest end, unbarred its gates, made its prisoners come out, and trod for them the way above by the person (*qnômâ*) of your divinity.[48]

Immediately after this event, the prayer shifts to petition for the youths.

A further explicit reference to the descent to Sheol occurs in the eighth act concerning the household of Migdônyâ and Karîsh. Having been cast into prison, Thomas

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46. Drijvers, "East of Antioch," 16–17.

47. W. Wright, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871), 1:179–180 (syr.).

ܘܚܘܝܬ ܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܟ ܒܡܓܪܬ ܪܘܚܟ ܥܡ ܐܢܫܘܬܢ.
ܟܕ ܣܚܦܬܝܗܝ ܠܒܝܫܐ ܡܢ ܚܝܠܗ : ܘܩܪܝܬ ܒܩܠܟ ܡܢ ܠܡܝ̈ܬܐ ܘܚܝܘ

I will refer to the Greek text of the *Acts of Thomas* only when a major variant appears. Otherwise, my focus is on the reception of the emerging motif of the descent to Sheol in the Syriac idiom.

48. Wright, *Acts*, 1:180 (syr.).

ܘܢܚܬܬ ܠܟ ܠܫܝܘܠ ܘܡܛܝܬ
ܥܕܡܐ ܠܣܘܦܗ ܘܦܬܚܬ ܬܪ̈ܥܝܗ ܘܐܦܩܬ ܐܣܝ̈ܪܝܗ
ܘܕܫܬ ܠܗܘܢ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܠܥܠܐ ܒܩܢܘܡܗ ܕܐܠܗܘܬܟ

prays a long bipartite prayer of praise and petition. The praise section consists of forty-two short ejaculations that alternate ascribing glory to the Father (*shabaḥ*, "to glorify") and praise to the Son (*halel*, "to praise"), usually with an appositive or further attribution. This address is followed by a relative clause that makes explicit the motive for praise or glory. After the last trope is a concluding section of praise:

> Let every mouth and every tongue, the worlds and creatures both hidden and revealed, glorify the Father, worship the Son, and praise your Holy Spirit. Your angels glorify you on high through your Messiah, who was peace and hope to the dead in Sheol, who lived and were raised.[49]

This passage has an interesting echo in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, the oldest extant eucharistic prayer.[50]

The image of Jesus' confrontation with the Enemy appears in an exhortation to belief that Thomas makes in prison. After an appeal to "believe in the Healer of all pains," Thomas shifts to prayer, remembering the incarnation. He then names Jesus as "this one whom the enemy feared when he saw him and trembled, and asked him who he was and what was his

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49. Wright, 1:283 (syr.).

ܡܫܒܚܝܢ ܠܐܒܐ ܘܣܓܕܝܢ ܠܒܪܐ ܘܡܗܠܠܝܢ
ܠܪܘܚܟ ܩܕܝܫܐ. ܟܠ ܦܘܡܝܢ ܘܟܠ ܠܫܢܝܢ ܥ̈ܠܡܐ ܘܒܪ̈ܝܬܐ
ܕܟܣܝܢ ܘܓ̈ܠܝܢ ܀ ܡܫܒܚܝܢ ܠܟ ܒܪܘܡܐ ܡ̈ܠܐܟܝܟ ܒܐܝܕܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܟ : ܕܗܘܐ ܫܝܢܐ ܘܣܒܪܐ ܒܫܝܘܠ
ܠܡ̈ܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܘ ܘܐܬܢܚܡܘ

50. See A. Gelston, ed., *The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 48. The fact that the angels are mentioned here in the midst of stock language of "let every mouth and tongue" could bolster the position that the Sanctus in the Addai and Mari is a very early addition. A noteworthy characteristic of Thomas's prayers throughout the acts is the bipartite structure of anamnesis and epiclesis. Even prayers sometimes labeled purely epicletic prayers by some liturgical scholars are preceded by anamestic ejaculations to Jesus.

renown."[51] A final admonishment to hear and believe in Christ follows, and the next chapter indicated that Thomas rose and prayed the Lord's Prayer.

Judas Thomas also prays just before the baptisms at the house of Wîzan. The prayer addresses Christ with a series of titles (companion and help, voice, rest, physician without cost). One of these names Christ "the resort and haven of those that go forth into the region of darkness."[52] This series of invocations then shifts to a more explicit anamnesis of salvific activity, beginning with the crucifixion and then the descent:

> You descended to Sheol with mighty power and the dead saw you and lived, and the ruler of death was not able to bear [it]. You ascended with great glory and took up with you all who sought refuge with you and tread a way for them on high.[53]

After the anamnestic section, the prayer then invokes Christ to heal and be with those to be baptized. The anointing with oil, accompanied by its own epicletic prayer, follows. The formula with which the anointing of the heads is done asks that the anointing be "for the destruction of the enemy."[54]

Of particular note is the recurrence of the descent motif in the context of prayer in the *Acts of Thomas*. It figures strongly in anamnesis of the redemptive action of Christ. Conquering the Evil One manifests Jesus' divinity, and his liberation of the prisoners of Sheol

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51. Wright, *Acts*, 1:312 (syr.).
ܗܘܐ ܕܝܢ ܢܨܚܢܗ ܒܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ ܕܝܠ . ܘܐܬܚܙܝܬ ܐܠܗܘܬܗ . ܘܫܡܥܗ ܗܘܐ ܠܟܠܗ

52. Wright, 1:322 (syr.). ܒܝܬ ܓܘܣܐ ܘܠܡܐܢܐ ܕܢܦܩܝܢ ܒܐܬܪܐ ܕܚܫܘܟܐ

53. Wright, 1:322 (syr.).
ܐܢܬ ܗܘ ܕܢܚܬܬ ܠܫܝܘܠ ܒܚܝܠܐ ܬܩܝܦܐ
ܘܚܙܐܘܟ ܡ̈ܝܬܐ ܘܚܝܘ
ܘܠܐ ܐܫܟܚ ܫܠܝܛܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܠܡܣܝܒܪܘ
ܘܣܠܩܬ ܒܫܘܒܚܐ ܣܓܝܐܐ ܘܐܣܩܬ
ܥܡܟ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܕܓܘܣܟ : ܘܕܪܫܬ ܠܗܘܢ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܠܪܘܡܐ

54. Wright, 1:324 (syr.). ܠܚܘܒܠܗ ܕܒܥܠܕܒܒܐ

his omnipotence. The description of the descent itself draws together themes of liberation, victory, and hope.

The Odes of Solomon

Discovered in 1905 in Syriac manuscripts and published by J. Rendel Harris in 1909, the *Odes of Solomon* rank among the most mysterious of early Christian literature. They have been acclaimed as the earliest hymnal or even the earliest nonbiblical work in Syriac. However, questions about their provenance and original language have elicited much scholarly debate. The majority opinion considers them to be originally in Greek from the second half of the second century in Syria. Others defend Syriac as their original language and trace their origins to an Judeo-Christian community in Syria. Fewer consider Hebrew/Aramaic as their original language.[55] Some have dated the Odes as early as the late first (ca. 90) to early second century (ca. 120).[56] David E. Aune summarizes the majority findings:

> The Odes of Solomon were probably composed in Greek at Antioch (or if in Syriac, than at Edessa), by one who was at home in a Jewish Christian religious context. The undeniable syncretistic or proto-Gnostic elements which occasionally emerge in the Odes is [*sic*] a

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55. See the relevant bibliography in notes of James Hamilton Charlesworth, "Odes of Solomon: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, N.J., 1985), 2:725–728. An impressive number of early Semitic scholars, including R. H. Connolly, F. C. Burkitt, H. Gunkel, and G. Kittel, as well as A. F. J. Klijn, W. Bauer, and M. Philonenko, favor Greek as the original language. S. Brock remains unconvinced, but leans toward Greek as well (see *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, Syrian Church Series 9 [Poona, India: Anita Printers, 1979], 27 and 27, n. 19. Supporters of Syriac as the original language include J. Bernard, J. R. Harris and A. Mingana, and A. Vööbus. The question of origin, language, etc., is unevenly rehearsed most recently by Ephrem Azar in his French translation of the odes, *Les Odes de Salomon*, ed. and trans. Ephrem Azar, Sagesse chrétienne (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1996), 15–71.

56. See the discussion in David Edward Aune, "The Present Realization of Eschatological Salvation in the Odes of Solomon," in *The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 166–174.

> phenomenon which was deeply rooted in Syrian Christianity before "orthodoxy" was rigidly distinguished from "heterodoxy."[57]

Several points of this majority opinion call for pause. First, Aune implies a single author ("one"), while it is also possible that there were several composers or a community that compiled songs from various sources. Thus the final "hymnal" could be the work of several editors over a period of time, collecting and selecting material appropriate to a particular community's need. Arguments over the original language in a thoroughly bilingual region call for a more moderate position about their certainly elusive "original text." The extant Syriac texts might better be read as Syriac texts, not reading for the lost Greek "original." Third, the theological and cultural context of the Odes, an area so influenced by Marcion, Bar Dayṣān, and Mani, necessitates a more careful estimation of syncretistic and gnostic elements. H. J. W. Drijvers's studies of the Odes in their historical and theological context offer a more convincing interpretation of their place in Syriac-speaking Christianity. He suggests:

> . . . that the Odes contain outspoken anti-Marcionite polemics, that they express christological conceptions in a highly symbolic and reflective wording that are based on second-century Antiochene theology with all its philosophical terminology, [and] that they betray the influence of Tatian's Diatessaron and encratitic interpretation of christian tradition.[58]

Drijvers also shows the formal parallels with the Manichaean psalms and imagery and how the Odes themselves target Manichaean and Marcionite teachings with an eye to affirming the positions of the 'great Church'. He gives a rather late date for the Odes, ca. 275.[59]

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57. Aune, 174.

58. Drijvers, "Odes of Solomon," in *East of Antioch*, 117. See his "Die Oden Salomos und die Polemik mit den Markioniten im syrischen Christentum," in *East of Antioch*.

59. Drijvers, "Odes of Solomon," 129. Luise Abramowski has registered her concerns about Drijvers's thesis. She does not consider his anti-Manichaean thesis valid, but she does judge that he

A further point of scholarly debate is the cultic setting of the Odes. One of the first commentators on the Odes argued well for their baptismal background.[60] Other have considered his approach extreme and argued that the Odes "are windows through which we can occasionally glimpse the earliest Christians at worship; especially their apparent stress on baptism."[61] Here again, some nuance is appropriate. Bernard's attempt to see the entire collection as a hymnal for the public celebration of baptism overstates the evidence.[62] It would be more judicious to acknowledge that hymns played an important role in public worship, not only for doxological purposes but catechetical ones as well. These hymns, then, have a distinct cultic ethos in which baptism is paramount, though their specific use in performance remains traceable only through their genre. If the earlier dating of the Odes (first or early second century) is accepted, then the charismatic character and place of the prophet in the earliest days of the Christian worship would need to be considered. This would give further argument to considering the Odes as a collection of charismatic or prophetic hymns by which those who join in the singing "participate in the eschatological salvation

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is correct in claiming an anti-Marcionite impetus. See "Sprache und Abfassungszeit der Oden Salomos," *Oriens Christianus* 68 (1984): 83–90, and her review of *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity*, by Han J. W. Drijvers, *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S. 38 (1987): 218–219.

60. J. H. Bernard, *The Odes of Solomon*, Texts and Studies 8, no. 3 (Neudeln: Krause Reprints, 1967; original Cambridge, 1912).

61. Charlesworth, "Odes" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:728. See the more recent effort of Mark Pierce, "Themes in the «Odes of Solomon» and Other Early Christian Writings and their Baptismal Character," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 98 (1984): 35–59.

62. See Bernard, 42.

through the proleptic experience of participating in the future heavenly worship of God within the setting of an earthly community assembled for worship."[63]

Following form criticism of the psalms, Rudolf Abramowski classified the Odes' literary genres: teaching poems, community songs, and private odes.[64] With regard to the latter, some have ascribed the "I" to Christ speaking (as Charlesworth does in his translation). Careful examination of the odes reveals a "frequent and almost imperceptible" shift from the Christian (as an *alter Christus)* and Christ himself.[65] Given the theological trends of the day, emphasis was placed on the Christian being united with Christ as an '*alter christus*'. Thus, the speaker is one and the same Christ. Worship is the milieu wherein this transformation takes place because it enables the Christian to participate in eschatological "rest" or experience the restoration of paradisaical status. Thus, the dual identity of the persona serves to underline the seamless unity between Christ and Christian, head and members.

This particular theological vision calls forth a mode of poetry where the "I" can also instruct the assembly about God's knowledge and salvation.[66] Thus the genre of the ode itself is generative of a particular horizon of meaning that becomes intrinsic to their

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63. Aune, 183.

64. Rudolf Abramowski, "Der Christus der Salomonoden," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 25 (1936): 50. *Lehrdichtungen*, *Gemeindelieder*, and *Individualoden* respectively.

65. See Aune, 176, and R. Abramowski, 58–61.

66. See Drijvers, "Solomon," 127–128. He notes that the title "Odes of Solomon" is an intentional parallel to Wisdom literature in general and the Wisdom of Solomon in particular, where King Solomon gains immortality through divine wisdom.

interpretation.[67] The singer proleptically participates in the eschatological situation of "rest."[68] Through the lyric style and heightened emotion of an ode, the singer, at once a fusion of Christ and the Christian, can transmit the heavenly/divine economy through performance to the assembly.

The descent into Sheol figures strongly in several of the *Odes of Solomon*.[69] In Ode 15, the odist sings:

> I put on incorruption through his name / And put off corruption by his grace.
> Death was destroyed before my face. / And Sheol was brought to nought by my word.[70]

The reference here comes after the odist has extolled the light of the Lord that has dispelled darkness. The odist then sings of the eternal life (*ḥayê dlâ mawtâ*, literally "life without death") that has been given to all the faithful.

Ode 17 employs an ascent-descent motif. While it is possible that verses 9–16 speak about Christ's coming to earth and proclaiming the Gospel there, there are several key images

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67. See H. J. W. Drijvers, "Solomon as Teacher: Early Syriac Didactic Poetry," in *IV Symposium Syriacum: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers, et al., OCA 229 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Press, 1987), 123–134.

68. See Ode 26, for example, where the odist's state is one of "rest." See also Matthew 11:27–29.

69. See the studies by D. Plooij, "Der Descensus ad inferos in Aphrahat und den Oden Salomos," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums* 14 (1913): 222–231, who cites strong parallels with Aphrahat's writings, and William Romaine Newbold, "The Descent of Christ in the Odes of Solomon," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 31 (1912): 168–209, who considers the motif as gnostic and that it refers to the descent of Christ to earth.

70. James Hamilton Charlesworth, ed. and trans., *The Odes of Solomon: The Syriac Texts*, Texts and Translations 13, Pseudepigrapha Series 7 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholar's Press, 1977), Ode 15:8–9. Unless noted, I provide my own translation.

ܠܒܫܬ ܠܐ ܚܒܠܐ ܒܝܕ ܫܡܗ :
ܘܫܠܚܬ ܠܚܒܠܐ ܒܛܝܒܘܬܗ
ܡܘܬܐ ܐܬܒܛܠ ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܦܪܨܘܦܝ :
ܘܫܝܘܠ ܐܬܒܛܠܬ ܒܡܠܬܝ

that mark the descent in question as pertaining to Sheol: opening closed doors (v. 9b), binding and loosing (v. 12),[71] bestowing life and resurrection (v. 13–15), in gathering of all the living with Christ (v. 15–16). Verse 10 echoes Isaiah 45:2 most explicitly:

> I battered the bars of iron,
> Then my own fetter grew hot and melted before me.[72]

The Ode opens with the declaration, "I was crowned with my God" (*e'tkallet dên b'alahy*), and then speaks of the odist's transformation into the likeness of a new person *(dmûtâ dparṣôpâ ḥadtâ)*. These are both strong images for baptism. However, in the context of this ode, their function could also be to allude to the baptized person's new state in life. If the imagery is not circumscribed by a baptismal reference, the victory and renewal could as well refer to a victory over adversaries or dire straits. Thus the battered bars image emphasizes the struggle in a seemingly no-win situation.

In Ode 22, descent-ascent imagery appears in the very first verse, "He who makes me descend from the height, and ascend from the lower realm. . . . " Like Ode 17, it is not clear if "lower realm" here means earth itself or the inner regions of the earth, Sheol.[73] The accumulation of images in the subsequent verse lends support to interpreting the "lower realm" as Sheol. The language of binding and loosing appears, as does that of contest. In

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71. John Bowman points out that in context the language of binding and loosing "is that of exorcism; binding the demon and loosing his victim." To bind is to subdue the evil one. See "Exorcism and Baptism," in A *Tribute to Arthur Vööbus*, ed. R. H. Fischer (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1977), 254.

72. Ode 17:10. ܘܬܒܪܬ ܡܘܟܠܐ ܕܦܪܙܠܐ : ܘܦܪܙܠܐ ܕܝܠܝ ܚܡ ܘܐܬܦܫܪ ܩܕܡܝ

73. Charlesworth translates "from the regions below" and in a note observes that the word ܬܚܬܝܬܐ can mean "earthly realm." He supports his translation by noting that the word ܡܨܥܝܬܐ tends to be used to refer to the intermediary world between heaven and the underworld, i.e., the earth. Ode 90, n. 1. ܗܘ ܕܡܚܬ ܠܝ ܡܢ ܪܘܡܐ : ܘܡܣܩ ܠܝ ܡܢ ܬܚܬܝܬܐ

verses 8–9 the odist speaks of choosing the motionless dead and giving them life and energy, themes that are frequently associated with the activity of Christ in Sheol.

Ode 24 is a complex network of highly allusive images that have lead some commentators to conclude that it refers to Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, however remotely, and to the triumph over the infernal powers.[74] The opening lines read:

> A dove flew unto the head of our Lord Messiah
> Because he was her head.
> She sang above him,
> And her voice was heard.[75]

In a narrow frame that identifies this ode as a "baptismal ode," the scene is identified with the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. The dove flying and speaking is interpreted as sign of the Spirit resting on or coming into Jesus who is declared the beloved Son. But the subsequent verses, "And the inhabitants were afraid / And the sojourners were disturbed," do not follow. An alternative to the "baptismal reading" would be to see the dove as symbol both of death and divine presence common in this era.[76] The flying bird is a harbinger of a tragic noble death.[77]

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74. See Charlesworth, p. 99, n. 3. Bieder explains that from verse 5 on, "Wir halten hier ferner fest: Taufe Christi, Tod Christi, Descensus, Ausbreitung des 'Weges'(Act.!) sind hier nacheinander visiert." *Die Vorstellung von der Höllenfahrt Jesu Christi*, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 19 (Zurich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1949), 174.

75. Ode 24:1. ܝܘܢܐ ܦܪܚܬ ܥܠ ܪܫܗ ܕܡܪܢ ܡܫܝܚܐ : ܡܛܠ ܕܪܫܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ
ܘܙܡܪܬ ܥܠܘܗܝ : ܘܐܫܬܡܥ ܩܠܗ
Charlesworth points the verb as a *pa'el* and interprets the preposition ܥܠ in a static "upon." Therefore, he suggests that there is no progression in the dove's flight, so he renders this verse, "The dove fluttered over the head." However, if the verb is pointed as a *p'al*, it suggests my reading: "The dove flew unto the head." In the next verse the bird ܘܙܡܪܬ ܥܠܘܗܝ. He translates, "And she sang over him." I take the two verses to be depicting a scene that the odist sees: A singing dove flies down to the head of the Lord. This action is what sets the 'plot' into motion.

76. See Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 8, *Pagan Symbols in Judaism* (New York: Bollingen-Pantheon, 1958), 27–46. On the interpretation of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan as auguring the tragic drama of his righteous death, see Lief E. Vaage, "Bird-watching at the Baptism of Jesus: Early Christian Mythmaking in Mark 1:9–11," in *Reimagining*

This would account for the reaction of the inhabitants and foreigners, as well as the death of the flying creature falling from flight (*pārḥatâ shebqat gepyeh*, literally "left behind its wings") and the creeping things dying in verse 4. The event augurs the death of the Lord Messiah.

From this scene follows verses 5–8, which recounts the entry of the Lord into the depths. The inhabitants there are in labor and seek the Lord. Verse 7 is especially cryptic: "But the abysses sank in the submersion of the Lord, / and they perished in that thought of theirs from the first."[78] The verb root *ṭb*ʿ carries the range of meanings "sink," "to be immersed," "to be swallowed up" and, with water, "to be drowned." The root also conveys the meanings of "to imprint," "to mark" or "to seal."[79] If one forced baptismal imagery here, the verse could read: "And marked then are the depths with the signet of the Lord."[80] But in the context of the following verses that descibe the situation of corruption, the Lord's destroying those who had not the truth, the "baptismal" reading makes little sense. The "abysses" could also be a metonym for Sheol and Death, who perish in the thought that none come out of

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Christian Origins. A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack, ed. Elizabeth Castelli and Hal Taussig (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 280–294. Of related interest are the studies by Christopher T. Begg. He takes up the theme of the dove who carries news of an infraction of an agreement or that portends the unpeaceful demise of a treaty-breaker. See his "Doves and Treaty-Making: Another Possible Reference," *Biblische Notizien* 48 (1989): 8–11, and "The Covenantal Dove in Psalm lxxiv 19-20," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 78–81.

77. See Vaage and Begg.

78. Ode 24:7.
ܘܛܒܥܘ ܕܝܢ ܬܗ̈ܘܡܐ ܒܛܒܥܬܗ ܕܡܪܝܐ : ܘܐܒܕܘ ܒܗܝ ܡܚܫܒܬܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܗܘܘ ܡܢ ܠܘܩܕܡ

79. Payne Smith lists the intransitives first. Costaz lists the transitive usages of "to seal" first.

80. See Charlesworth, 96, n. 10.

their clutches. The end of the ode describes those who recognized the Lord's grace; they then know his righteousness (vv. 13–14). The scheme of descent, destruction, recognition, and offer of salvation mark significant features of the descent to Sheol here.

Ode 29 does explictly use imagery of Sheol: "He made me ascend from the depths of Sheol / and from the mouth of death he drew me."[81] In the context, though, the image functions to reinforce a situation of victory over enemies or nonbelievers. The odist praises the Lord of hope who has brought this victory to be. To ascend from Sheol is almost a hyperbole here, expressing being rescued from a dire situation.

Ode 31 deploys imagery of the darkness and light and of vanishing depths. "The depths vanished before the Lord / And darkness dissipated before his appearance."[82] The appearance of the Lord would be like light. The Lord opens his mouth to speak grace and joy and offers eternal life to his hearers. While the images of illumination and dissipation have been used to evoke Sheol, the more typical language of the abyss is absent. Some baptismal or ascetic imagery occurs in verse 4 (becoming children) and verse 7 (taking eternal life, i.e., *ḥayê dlâ mawtâ* "life without death"). These brief allusions do not suggest a stronger link to the descent.

Ode 42 is devoted to the descent to Sheol and merits an extended citation of the reference. It appears in a series of contrasts between those who believe and accept the Lord and those who reject and persecute him. Those who receive him he embraces in love:

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81. Ode 29:4. ܘܐܣܩܢܝ ܡܢ ܠܥܘܡܩܗ ܕܫܝܘܠ : ܘܡܢ ܦܘܡܗ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܢܓܕܢܝ

82. Ode 31:1. ܐܬܦܫܪܘ ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܡܪܝܐ ܬܗ̈ܘܡܐ : ܘܐܬܚܒܠ ܚܫܘܟܐ ܡܢ ܚܙܘܗ

Sheol saw me and was grieved / And Death vomited me up and many with me.
I was vinegar and bitterness to it, / And I went down with it to its utmost depth.
It let go feet and head, / Because it could not endure my face.
I made a congregation of the living among its dead. /
And I spoke to them with living lips / Because my word will not fail.
And those who had died hastened toward me, / Cried out and said, "Have mercy on us, Son of God!"
And deal with us according to your kindness. / Remove from us the fetters of darkness
And open for us the gate by which we may come out to you / For we see that our death does not come near you.[83]

The Sheol imagery helps to reinforce a parallel between those who accept and those who reject the Lord. The ultimate rejection is Jesus' being vomited up by Death, because Jesus is a living one. While Death and Sheol cannot bear it, the shadowy dead do accept Jesus, and he brings them out.

Many scholars have noted the relative frequency of the descent to Sheol motif in the *Odes of Solomon*. If the early date of their composition and compilation are accepted, then the Odes become a significant witness to the development and extension of the descent. A series of images are clustered together to speak about the descent to Sheol and the activity of Jesus therein: being caught in the mouth of death, illumination, breaking bars, submersion, preaching, victory. However, the caution issued by Majella Franzmann advises against

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83. Ode 42:11–17.
ܫܝܘܠ ܚܙܬܢܝ ܘܐܬܟܪܝܬ : ܘܡܘܬܐ ܐܦܢܝ ܘܣܓܝ̈ܐܐ ܥܡܝ
ܚܠܐ ܘܡܪܪܬܐ ܗܘܝܬ ܠܗ : ܘܢܚܬܬ ܥܡܗ ܟܡܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܒܗ ܥܘܡܩܐ
ܪ̈ܓܠܐ ܘܪܫܐ ܐܪܦܝ : ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܐܫܟܚ ܠܡܣܝܒܪܘ ܦܪ̈ܨܘܦܝ
ܥܒܕܬ ܟܢܘܫܬܐ ܕܚ̈ܝܐ ܒܡܝ̈ܬܘܗܝ : ܘܡܠܠܬ ܥܡܗܘܢ ܒܣ̈ܦܘܬܐ ܚ̈ܝܬܐ
ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܒܛܝܠ ܡܠܬܝ
ܘܪܗܛܘ ܠܘܬܝ ܗܢܘܢ ܕܡܝܬܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܘܩܥܘ ܘܐܡܪܘ ܚܘܣ ܥܠܝܢ ܒܪܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ
ܘܥܒܕ ܥܡܢ ܐܝܟ ܒܣܝܡܘܬܟ ܘܐܫܪܝܢ ܡܢ ܐܣ̈ܘܪܐ ܕܚܫܘܟܐ
ܘܦܬܚ ܠܢ ܬܪܥܐ ܕܒܗ ܢܦܘܩ ܠܘܬܟ
ܚܙܝܢܢ ܓܝܪ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܩܪܒ ܠܟ ܡܘܬܢ

isolating a single motif from the whole of the collection.[84] This caution is well taken, given the very obscure and enigmatic language of the odes.

Franzmann sketches out an encompassing system of imagery at work in the compiled odes. In order to grasp what function the Sheol motif had, it has to be taken together with the whole scheme of descent/ascent in the odes. In turn, there is a motif of real or threatened violence and confrontation that runs through the collection. Franzmann sees this situation of opposition as giving way to the polar images of regions above/below and the ascending and descending instruments and people.[85] Thus descent and ascent take on a particular force to highlight human struggle and victory over one's adversary. Appeal to the descent to Sheol and Jesus' victory would have the effect of underlining the struggle and victory. The community, delivered from a crisis, can sing praise for the victory won.[86] The "salvation" is first from the conflict, then transformed in the worship setting to the spiritual realm. Rather than a baptismal setting, this community is so imbued with the importance of baptism that it merits frequent allusion, to celebrate its new state of safety. Alternatively, if the baptismal frame is maintained, use of the descent to Sheol motif would underscore the theme of baptism as struggle and victory.[87]

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84. See the remarks of Majella Franzmann, *The Odes of Solomon: An Analysis of the Poetical Structure and Form*, Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 20 (Freiburg, Switzerland, and Göttingen: UniversitätsVerlag Freiburg and Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991), 308–16.

85. Franzmann, 315.

86. See Franzmann, 309, who suggests some of the odes were used for a victory celebration.

87. In this line of interpretation, the epicletic prayer and anointing formula of the *Acts of Thomas*, "for the destruction of the enemy," is an interesting parallel.

Didascalia Apostolorum

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* is traditionally ascribed to the genre of early Christian literature known as ancient church orders. While the original was Greek, its point of origin has been determined to be northern Syria in the first half of the third century; Paul Bradshaw suggests ca. 230.[88] The whole order survives only in Syriac. The editor of the most recent edition of the *Didascalia* posits the first decades of the fourth century as the probably time of its translation into Syriac. Whether it was made before or after Aphrahat, he says, "is impossible to say."[89] A recent examination of its literary structure suggests that rather than being an early canonical work, the *Didascalia* is intended for pastoral admonition and teaching occasioned by particular problems in a third-century community.[90]

A reference to the descent to Sheol appears in the elaborate concluding doxology that is almost creedal in style at the point the image appears. It is embeded in a series of relative clauses:

88. Paul Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Chrisitian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford, 1992), 88.

89. *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac: Chapters I–X*, ed. Arthur Vööbus, CSCO 402, Scriptores Syri 176 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1979), 28.

90. Georg Schöllgen, "Die Literarische Gattung der syrischen Didaskalie," in *IV Symposium Syriacum: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers et al., OCA 229 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1987), 149–159. "Die viele Aspekte unberüksichigt lassen mußte, ist vielleicht doch deutlich geworden, daß es sich bei der *Didaskalie* ihrem Selbstvertändnis nach nicht um ein Werk früher kanonistischer Systematik handelt. Sie is vielmehr eine pastorale Mahn- und Lehrschrift zu einzelnen aktuellen und latenten pastoral Probleme und Mißständen der Gemeinden" (159).

> [To God through Jesus Christ] who was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate and fell asleep that he might announce to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all his holy ones the consummation of the world and the resurrection that will come to be for the dead, and rose from the dead.[91]

Here there is no explicit reference to any interaction between Jesus and Death or to Jesus' liberation of the righteous dead from Sheol. The whole event of Jesus' death, though, is ordered to preaching to the patriarchs and righteous ancestors of the final resurrection of some.

Doctrina Addai

The *Teaching of Addai,* which recounts the exploits of Addai the apostle and the story of King Abgar, is reputed to originate in the second half of the third century in the environs of Edessa. Drijvers's study of the historical situation in which the legend arose sheds light on its purpose:

> The structure and characteristic elements of the Abgar legend become clear and find their explanation in the historical situation in that particular period in which Manichaeism threatened and competed with Christian belief and behavior in Edessa. The name of the apostle Addai, the correspondance of Jesus and Abgar, the special relationship between the king and the apostle, and the occurrence of a portrait of Jesus painted by Ḥanan and brought to the king find their special meaning in a milieu dominated by the followers of Mani and the Manichaean mission.[92]

In the *Teaching of Addai,* the nascent Christian Church in the Edessene area faced up to the challenges of its rival Manichaeism, confronting the local followers' concepts and practices. Addai gives a summary of the faith in quasi-creedal fashion in the course of his preaching to the king, his retinue, and as it happens, the whole region of Mesopotamia:

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91. *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac: Chapters XI–XXVI*, ed. Arthur Vööbus, CSCO 407, Scriptores Syri 179 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1979), 265, ll. 8–11.
ܕܐܨܛܠܒ ܒܝܘܡܝ̈ ܦܢܛܝܘܣ ܦܝܠܛܘܣ: ܘܫܟܒ ܐܝܟ ܕܢܣܒܪ ܠܐܒܪܗܡ ܘܠܐܝܣܚܩ
ܘܠܝܥܩܘܒ ܘܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܩܕ̈ܝܫܘܗܝ ܫܘܠܡܗ ܕܥܠܡܐ: ܘܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܗܘܝܐ ܠܡܝ̈ܬܐ : ܘܩܡ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܡܝ̈ܬܐ

92. Drijvers, "Early Syriac-Speaking,"160.

> . . . the Son of God who had descended from heaven, had put on a body, and became a human being. He handed himself over and was crucified for all humankind. And while he was lifted up on the Cross, he darkened the sun in the firmament. When he had gone inside the grave, he was raised and went forth from the grave with many and those who were guarding the tomb did not see how he went forth from the grave.[93]

Christ is the Lord of Life who put on the body and went into the grave. There is no account of what happened in the grave, a synonym for Sheol. But Jesus liberates many, presumably the righteous in great numbers who came forth with him bodily from Sheol.

A bit further on in his preaching, which is focussed on Jesus as the Son of God, Addai asserts:

> Nor was it by a human being that the upright and the just had been raised but by him who had given power against death from the beginning.[94]

Here the identity of those who came forth is clearer, namely, the upright and the just. Asserting Christ's divinity—the power over death from the beginning—seems to be the main focus of the passage, and the event of the resurrection of the just reinforces his divine action.

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93. My translation of the Syriac in George Howard, ed. and trans. *The Teaching of Addai*, Text and Translations 16, Early Christian Literature Series 4 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 19 (syr). This is the Syriac text of G. Phillips, originally published in 1876.
ܒܪܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܢܚܬ ܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܫܡܝܐ : ܘܠܒܫ ܗܘܐ ܦܓܪܐ ܘܗܘܐ ܒܪܐܢܫܐ . ܘܫܠܡ ܗܘܐ ܢܦܫܗ
ܘܐܙܕܩܦ ܚܠܦ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܒ̈ܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ . ܘܟܕ ܐܬܬܠܝ ܗܘܐ ܥܠ ܙܩܝܦܐ .
ܐܚܫܟ ܗܘܐ ܫܡܫܐ ܒܪܩܝܥܐ ܘܟܕ ܥܠ ܗܘܐ ܠܓܘ ܩܒܪܐ ܐܬܬܥܝܪ ܗܘܐ
ܘܢܦܩ ܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܩܒܪܐ ܥܡ ܣ̈ܓܝܐܐ
ܘܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܢܛܪܝܢ ܗܘܘ ܩܒܪܐ . ܠܐ ܚܙܘ ܗܘܘ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܢܦܩ ܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܩܒܪܐ
Eusebius quotes this in *Hist. Eccl.* 1:13 as κατέβη εἰς τὸν ᾅδην, which is more Syriac idiom than in the Syriac!

94. Howard, 27 (syr.). ܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܒܪܢܫܐ ܐܬܬܩܝܡܘ ܗܘܘ ܟ̈ܐܢܐ ܘܙ̈ܕܝܩܐ .
ܐܠܐ ܒܗܘ ܕܝܗܒ ܗܘܐ ܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܪܫܝܬܐ

Early Creedal Formulations

The creed, marked by its declaratory form and catechetical intent, has its roots in the baptismal profession of faith.[95] The earliest recorded Syriac creed comes from the Synod of Seleucia-Ctsephon in 410, and no mention of the descent to Sheol is made.[96] Scholarly interest in the development of creedal formulae in the Syriac churches prior to Nicaea lead to several attempts to recreate a creed by teasing out stock phrases that occurred in the earliest extant writings and in Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*.[97] Robert H. Connolly suggested a reconstruction of an early creed that included the descent to Sheol or at least the descent to the dead, preserving the Syriac idiom for *ek nekrôn*. He further suggested that Syria is the point of origin for the phrase in the West. There, the first mention of the descent to Hell is found in creeds of semi-Arian, more precisely homoean, tendency, the earliest being the creedal formula of the Fourth Formula of Sirmium (359).[98] The creeds of Niké (359) and Constantinople (360) also include it. What is distinctive about the Sirmium formula is the

95. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3d ed. (New York: Longman, 1972), 30–61.

96. A. Vööbus, "New Sources for the Symbol in Early Syrian Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 26 (1972): 291–296; Jean Gribomont, "Le Symbole de foi de Séleucie-Ctésiphon (410)," in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus*, ed. R. H. Fischer (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1977), 283–294, who suggests the eastern version found in the Synodicon is a more scrupulous translation of the *Nicaenum*, while the western version reflects an earlier wording. The wording in question is for the incarnation, not the descent to Sheol.

97. R. Connolly, "The Early Syriac Creed," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums* 7 (1906): 202–223.

98. The *homoean* theological position fell between the *homoousios* camp and the radical Arians. The formula of Sirmium typifies their position: Christ is "like the Father (ὅμοιος τῷ πτάρὶ) in all things."

allusion to Job 38:17 where the gatekeepers of Hades shudder at the sight of Christ.[99] Rufinus, commenting on the creed in use at Aquileia (ca. 404), observed that the descent is mentioned but it is not in the Roman or Eastern creeds. He accords it the same valence as "buried."[100] However, the formulae of Niké and Constantinople mention both the burial and the descent.[101]

What is intriguing about the creed of Seleucia-Ctesiphon is that it includes the distinctive expression of the early Syriac tradition for the incarnation, namely, Christ "put on a body," but the equally distinctive expression of rising from Sheol or the place of the dead is absent. The *Nicaenum* reads, "became incarnate, became a human being, suffered, and rose on the third day."[102] The Greek *sarkōthenta*, "became incarnate," is rendered in Seleucia-Ctesiphon by the rich Syriac idiom *lbesh pagrâ*, "he put on a body."[103] But what follows

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99. See the study by Rémi Gounelle, "Le frémissment des portiers de l'Enfer à la vue du Christ. *Jb* 38, 17b et trois symboles de foi des années 359-360," in *Le Livre de Job chez les Pères*, Cahiers de Biblia Patristica 5 (Strasbourg: Centre d'Analyse et de Documentation patristiques, 1996), 177–213.

100. *Expositio symboli* 16–26; in *Tyrannii Rufini Opera*, ed. M. Simonetti, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1961).

101. Both read καὶ ταφέντα. Then Niké adds: καὶ εἰς τὰ καταχθόνια κατελθόντα ὃν αὐτος ὁ ᾅδης ἐτρόμασε. Constantinople inserts: καὶ εἰς τὰ καταχθόνια κατεληλυθόντα ὅν τινα καὶ αὐτος ὁ ᾅδης ἔπτηξεν. See the Greek text in J. A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 67.

102. σαρκωθέντα, ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, παθόντα καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρα.

103. On the theological schema of "putting on a body," see Sebastian Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in the Syriac Tradition," in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, ed. Margot Schmidt with Carl Friedrich Geyer (Regensburg: Pustet, 1982), 11–40. See also Aleksander Kowalski, "«Revestíti di Gloria» Adam ed Eva nel commento di sant'Efrem a Gen 2,25," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 3 (1982): 41–60. For further background see Nahum Waldman, "The Imagery of Clothing, Covering, and Overpowering," *Journal of Ancient Near East Studies* 19 (1989): 161–170, who examines Sumerian and Akkadian terminology and how it is restructured and adjusted in Hebrew and Syriac.

translates the Greek text literally: *hwâ barnāshâ whash wqām lyawmâ tlītāyâ* ("he became a human being and suffered and rose on the third day"). The lack of any mention of Sheol is further indication that the formula is a translation of the *Nicaenum* and not an original Syriac composition. The translator is confronted with the Greek *terminus technicus sarkōthenta* and renders it in a more dynamic fashion with the Syriac idiom. But the other Greek terms—which pass over the descent and the intervenient period to the resurrection in silence—do not receive a similar dynamic translation.

Here is an example of the negotiation of tradition by a particular genre. Creeds, though originally related to the baptismal liturgy, bear the marks of an exigency for precision and conformity of language to the faith of the 'great Church'. While local preaching might retain received and traditional images, local catechetical needs could well have demanded more careful formulation to dispel ambiguity. The local theological imagination could explain *sarkōthenta* in known terms of "putting on a body," which indicated the power this image had as a means of explicating right belief. What is intriguing is that there was not a similar desire to render the dry, terse Greek *pathonta kai anastanta* in more imaginative local expression. The *Nicaenum* as a product of the controversies of the 'great Church' had a slow power to erase more traditional local expression of the faith that, while lacking the requisite precision of the creedal genre, bore far more weight in the local church's imagination.

Early Literary Perod: Assessment

There are no sustained developments of the descent of Christ into Sheol in this early period. Rather the various sources, from the prayers of the *Acts of Thomas*, the *Didascalia*, the preaching of Addai, and songs of the *Odes of Solomon*, show that the trajectories of the

biblical witness are continued. There is a certain similarity of vocabulary and imagery that is taking shape around a scheme of destruction, kerygma, and liberation. While the biblical witness is sporadic or allusive, these early Syriac texts begin assimilating the images and allusions into a more complex narrative frame. The descent has a vivid quality that interweaves biblical and mythic figures, making it an effective image in prayer for release, thanksgiving for deliverance, or hope for the ancestors in the faith.

Alois Grillmeier has suggested a linear development of interpretation of the descent with the confluence of three distinct motifs.[104] In a study that takes account of primarily Latin and Greek evidence, Grillmeier argues that the descent of Christ took a soteriological and then later christological trajectory. Three ways of conceiving the descent, according to a baptismal motif, a preaching motif, and a battle motif, emerge from the original soteriological focus of the descent teaching.

The early Syriac evidence suggests a far more complex situation that makes Grillmeier's linear trajectory seem imposed. The descent appears most strongly in three distinct genric manifestations roughly contemporaneous with each other: prayer, hymn, and preaching. These liturgical genres suggest that the theme had reached a certain degree of integration in the theological imagination of the day, but the cumulative effect of the references shows that rather than distinct motifs interpenetrating, there is a gradual building up of imagery and extensions of meaning according to the particular context. Thus, to

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104. Alois Grillmeier, "Der Gottessohn im Totenreich: Soteriologische und christologische Motivierung der Descensuslehre in der älteren christlichen Überlieferung," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 71 (1949): 1–53, 184–203. This appears in a somewhat revised version in *Mit Ihm und in Ihm: Christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven* (Freiburg: Herder, 1975), 76–174.

emphasize the divinity and omnipotence of Christ the Healer prior to an anointing, Thomas draws on the descent. To proclaim the new state in life and the way that all the baptized should follow, the Odes take up the image of Christ treading a path with all the righteous. Or, in a complimentary fashion, to give hope in the midst of crisis, the odes draw out the images of victory. While prayer and preaching suggest a spontaneity in production, a distinctive phraseology emerges, highly allusive and reflective of a network of intersignification.

What made the continuation of and appeal to the imagery culturally desirable? The theological climate of the day may well have provided an impetus.[105] Against Marcionite and gnostic teaching, appeal to the descent theme allowed "orthodox" Christians to argue for the salvation of all humanity, including those who died before Christ came. Second, it enabled them to demonstrate the extent of Christ's saving activity: He came even to the deepest realm of the earth. Also, in a turbulent political era with destruction of enemies and conquering territory, the "battle" motif would retain a popular appeal. This political turbulence is echoed in the spiritual realm by emphasis on the struggle of asceticism.

THE GOLDEN PERIOD: APHRAHAT, EPHRAEM, AND ANONYMOUS WORKS

The fourth century begins what is dubbed the "golden period" of Syriac literature that extends to the seventh century. In this period, outstanding writers emerged who expressed

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105. The following draws upon Grillmeier's argument, "Gottessohn im Totenreich," 1–53.

the breadth and depth of Syriac theology through a variety of genres, particularly poetry. Like the liturgical ethos of the Odes, much of the literature of the golden period has a distinct liturgical or catechetical quality. This section focuses on the key figures Aphrahat and Ephraem.[106] As further testimony to the period, it takes up Qûrîlônâ and relevant anonymous or pseudepigraphal writings. I will give particular emphasis to Ephraem and the genres and liturgical context of his *opus*.

Aphrahat (ca. 270–ca. 345)

An important figure in the Persian Church, though his exact role in the community is not clear, Aphrahat is traditionally dubbed "the Persian sage." Not much is known about his life, but Aphrahat seems to have been a member of the *bnay qyāmâ*. His twenty-three *Demonstrations (taḥwyātâ)* were composed between 337 and 345. There were originally twenty-two *taḥwyātâ*, an acrostic of the twenty-two letters of the Syriac alphabet, to which a twenty-third demonstration ("On the Grape") was added. These expositions are addressed variably to a friend or friends to explain the given topic, almost *quaestiones disputatae* of the day. Aphrahat's Jewish context and use of Jewish sources is clear, and his use of Scripture reveals that he read the NT from the vantage point of OT such that "Christianity is given a place in the framework of the OT."[107] The *Demonstrations* also give the impression that Christians were in a very delicate situation with regard to the Sassanid empire.[108] This is

106. I will follow conventional spellings for the names of these figures. Following the transliteration schema I use, they would be Âprhaṭ and Âprêm respectively.

107. Van Rompay, 1:620.

108. See Van Rompay, 1:621

captured with the frequent motif of contest as a hallmark of Christian life and by war and warrior imagery, which also appeals to the strongly ascetical climate of the day.[109]

The descent into Sheol figures strongly at several junctures in Aphrahat's *Demonstrations.*[110] Attention here will be given to the highly developed discussion in the *Demonstration* 22, "On Death and the End Time," the mention of the descent in *Demonstration* 14, and to the schema of salvation history developed in *Demonstration* 8, "On the Vivification of the Dead."[111] In this demonstration, Aphrahat's attention is on the final resurrection of the dead. Aphrahat's exposition is occasioned by a dispute over how the dead will be raised and what sort of body they will have, because it is quite clear from looking at a tomb that one's body decomposes and is reduced to dust.[112]

Aphrahat explains that all the fathers looked for the resurrection of the dead: Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rebecca, and Joseph. Moses and Hanah told about it. Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekiel showed it.[113] Aphrahat then argues that the ultimate demonstration of the

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109. See Vööbus, *History of Asceticism* 1:88–90 and 3:7–11.

110. For an introduction and study of Aphrahat's theology and anthropology, see Marie-Joseph Pierre, ed. and trans., *Aphraate, le sage persan: Les Exposés I-X*, Sources Chrétiennes 349 (Paris: Edition du Cerf, 1988), 33–199. For his christology, see especially Peter Bruns, *Das Christusbild Aphrahats des Persischen Weises* (Bonn: Borengässer, 1990). See also Murray, *Symbols*, 369–376. More specific attention is given to the descent theme by August Vogl, "Die Scheolsvorstellungen Afrahats," *Ostkirckliche Studien* 27 (1978): 46–48. This is part of a study on Christ and Sheol in the early Syriac tradition that was never completed due to the author's untimely death in 1972. See also Plooij, "Der Descensus," 222–231.

111. The Syriac text of the *Demonstrations* can be found in *Aphraatis sapientis Persae Demontrationes*, ed. Jean Parisot, Patrologia Syriaca 1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot and Co., 1894). The reader is referred to this edition for the Syriac texts.

112. See 8:1; Parisot, p. 340.

113. See 8:7–12; Parisot, p. 372–385.

resurrection of the dead comes with Jesus, "because perfection abides with our Lord Jesus Christ, who by means of one voice and one word, will make the whole body of Adam rise up at the end."[114] Aphrahat recasts the gospel scene of Jesus' confrontation with the Saduccees, and extends it: "God said to Moses: 'I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob.' Lo! God is not of the dead, for all live for him."[115]

There is no explicit development of the descent in these passages, but Aphrahat has made clear that these righteous ancestors "live." While his focus is on the final resurrection, he sets out to demonstrate that Jesus is the perfection of what was promised and shown in the course of salvation history. The "whole body of Adam (*kuleh pagreh d'ādām*)" most likely refers to the whole human race.

In *Demonstration* 14 Aphrahat is concerned to give an account of the example of Jesus for those who work for peace. He turns to the descent to Sheol to bolster his argument:

> What did our Savior owe Death? What had he borrowed from Sheol?
> Since he was living, he died for the rebellious and reconciled them with his Father.
> He entered into Sheol, and he lead out its prisoners.
> He fought with the Evil One, and he conquered him.
> He trod him under foot, and he forced his way in.
> He seized its numbers, broke its gates, and battered its bars.
> He took away its thorns, and he put us at his head.
> He sealed us with his own blood.
> He unfastened the bound from the pit of confinement.
> He broke through the boundary and the sword's point.
> He took away the curse and nailed it to his cross.[116]

114. 8:13; Parisot, p. 385, ll. 21–23.

115. 8:16; Parisot, p. 392, ll. 25–26.

116. 14:31; Parisot, p. 652, ll. 3–14.

This excerpt is representative of a frequent rhetorical device of Aphrahat dubbed the exemplary sequence.[117] The conventions of the genre include remembrance of the past through a recital of God's acts or epiphanies, usually in the the third person singular or the first person singular.[118] Here Aphrahat has taken the instance of Christ's descent to Sheol and in conjunction with the conventions of the genre expanded the flat "he entered Sheol" by a series of vivid verbs that seem to draw on the whole stock of available Sheol motifs: freeing captives, treading/fighting the Evil One, battering bars *and* gates, sealing the dead, unfastening the shackles. Aphrahat also speaks of clearing away the thorny brush of Sheol. He exploits the available images to create a forceful argumentation of the fruits of labor for righteousness. The scene is graphic and gripping, with an elaborate account of Christ's subterranean redemptive activity.

The descent to Sheol occupies a central place in *Demonstration* 22. Death (*mawtâ*) is personified in Aphrahat's presentation. In the course of salvation history, God let Death know that it would not have power over all who are born in the world (22:3). He notes, for example, that Death did not have power over Enoch and Elijah. Furthermore, upon hearing the words of the prophet Isaiah that the dead shall live, their bodies rise from the dust (Is

117. See Robert Murray, "Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature," in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus. Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East*, ed. Robert Fischer (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1977), 110–125. See also the brief remarks of Pierre, 1:68–69.

118. The background to this genre is the Mesopotamian and later hellenistic pattern of aretology. Often sequences of people are woven into this pattern or divine salvific acts are contrasted with instances of human infidelity (the *rîb*). See Murray, "Rhetorical Patterns," 115–116. On the *rîb* genre, see Cesare Giraudo, *La struttura letteraria della preghiera eucaristica. Saggio sulla genesi letteraria di una forma*, Analecta Biblica 92 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 53–80.

26:19), Death was seized with amazment and sat down in mourning (22:3). Aphrahat gives an extended account of the definitive moment:

> When Jesus came, the slayer of Death, he put on a body from the seed of Adam, and was crucifed in his body, and he tasted Death. When [Death] realized thereby that [Jesus] had descended unto It, It trembled from its place and was troubled when It saw Jesus. It shut its gates and did not want to receive him. Then [Jesus] broke its gates and entered in and began to seize all its possessions. But when the dead saw the light in the darkness, they lifted up their heads from the imprisonment of Death. They looked out and saw the brightness of the king Messiah. Then the powers of darkness sat down in mourning, for Death was brought down from its power. Death tasted a medicine lethal to it and its hands went limp. It knew that the dead would live and and would escape from its servitude. When [Jesus] provoked Death by the seizing of all its possessions, [Death] howled and cried out with an embittered voice, saying, "Get out of my place and do not enter it! Who is this now who enters alive in my place?" While Death was crying out timorously, seeing the darkness beginning to come to an end for It and some of the righteous who were sleeping rising to go up with [Jesus], [Jesus] made known to It that when he comes in the fullness of time, he will bring out all the captives from its power, and they will go out toward him to see the light. Then Death threw Jesus up from its place when he had completed his ministration to the place of the dead and did not endure his being there. It did not please [Death] to devour him like all the other dead. It bore no rule over the Holy One, and he was not delivered to corruption.[119]

Aphrahat then explains that Jesus left the promise of life *(mûlkānâ dḥayê)* behind in Sheol like a poison, to ensure little by little that death would be destroyed. He explains that when someone realizes that he or she has consumed poison with food, he or she vomits up the food mixed with the poison. However, the poison, having already been inside the person, gradually spreads throughout the person's whole body, which then slowly dies. Aphrahat concludes, "The dead Jesus is the bringer of nought of Death, for through him life reigns."[120] Death no longer has the final victory. At the end, Christ's voice awakens and raises all the dead for judgement (22:15).

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119. 22:4; Parisot, p. 996, l. 23–p. 1000, l. 2.

120. 22:5; Parisot, p. 1000, l. 14–16.

Aphrahat has assimilated numerous images and makes extensions and development of the descent theme in the course of the *Demonstrations*. The personification of Death, the violent destruction and despoiling of Sheol, the images of light and poison, and the liberation of the dead come together, amplifying the descent and filling out the events of the temporal gap between the descent and ascent from the place of the dead. The conventions of the exemplary sequence genre that Aphrahat uses required him to undertake such expansion and extension, drawing both on biblical imagery and mythic or local imagery. Aphrahat puts emphasis on the descent in relationship to the final resurrection of the dead, using the image of poison speading through Sheol, guaranteeing its demise.[121] The ascetic context also lends itself to the motif of struggle. Christ battles the Evil One and his armies much like the *bnay qyāmâ* struggled to remain single-minded and of single purpose.[122]

Ephraem (ca. 306–373)

Ephraem, called by his contemporaries the "Harp of the Spirit," was born ca. 306. He spent the majority of his life in Nisibis. In 363 Nisibis was transferred from Roman to Persian control. Ephraem closely associated the 'great Church' with the sphere of the Roman empire, so went to Edessa, which was still under Roman auspices. He died there in 373.[123]

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121. For a brief treatment of the organic metaphors used by Aphrahat to speak about the final resurrection, see Carolyn Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 72–75.

122. See *Demonstration* 11:12, 21:10, and 17:11. See also Pierre, 1:170.

123. The secondary literature on Ephraem is vast. For some introduction to Ephraem's life and times, see especially Sidney Harrison Griffith, *'Faith Adoring the Mystery': Reading the Bible with St Ephraem the Syrian*, The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 1997 (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Marquette University Press, 1997); idem, "Images of Ephraem: the Syrian Holy Man and his Church," *Traditio* (1989–1990): 7–33; Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*

In a mostly romantic portrayal, Ephraem is depicted as a Western-style monastic and referred to as a deacon. The Syriac-speaking churches revere him as a *malpānâ*, a teacher of particular importance or prestige. While he usually is remembered as a deacon, Ephraem refers to himself as a "herdsman" for the Church. He seems to have been a fellow worker with the local bishops, very involved in the life of the flock, and is noted as a scripture commentator. Together with Bishop Jacob of Nisibis (d. 338), Ephraem founded and directed the famous school of Nisibis. The representations of Ephraem as a monk who withdrew from daily life is largely a later ecclesiastical construct, motivated to align the major figures of the Syrian church with the 'great Church' in times of theological controversy.[124] From Ephraem's own writing and reliable Syriac accounts, he emerges as a member of the *bnay qyāmâ*, a single one in God's service.

Most of Ephraem's works survive in Syriac, although some are extant only in Armenian.[125] Ephraem became a fierce defender of the Church's faith against theological controversies with the followers of Marcion, Mani, Bar Dayṣān, and Arius. Ephraem himself

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the Syrian (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1992); Kathleen McVey's introduction in *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, ed. and trans. Kathleen McVey, Classics of Western Spirituality Series (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1989), 3–48; and the general introduction to *St Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, trans. Edward G. Matthews and Joseph Amar, ed. Kathleen McVey, Fathers of the Church 91 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univeristy Press, 1994), 3–56. What follows draws heavily from the work of Griffith.

124. See Joseph P. Amar, "Byzantine Ascetic Monasticism and Greek Bias in the Vita Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 58 (1992): 123–156.

125. Many of the large number of works attributed to Ephraem in Greek that date in manuscript from the tenth century are of doubtful authenticity. See Griffith, '*Faith Adoring*', n. 6, and the remarks of Brock, *Luminous*, 17.

was suspicious of philosophical, scientific, or dispassionate attempts to explain the faith.[126] Rather, his approach is through profound contemplation of the mystical symbols (*râzê*) of the Bible and nature that yields an intricate vision of Christian faith. "The integral, Christian Bible is the constant measure of his thought, supplying the very idiom of his religious discourse."[127] Ephraem engages the *râzê* ("mystical symbols"). The *râzê* "from Nature and Scripture, incorporating the symbols and types, the names and titles which God has revealed, carry the human mind by way of faith into the very depths of the mystery that is the Incarnation of the Son of God."[128]

Genres of Ephraem's Writings

Ephraem's *oeuvre* can be divided into four distinct genres: two prose, plain prose and artistic prose; and two poetic, *madrāshê* and *mêmrê*.[129] These genres will serve as a organizing tool in my exposition. The plain prose genre is found in his commentaries on the Genesis, Exodus, and the Diatessaron and in his refutations of heresy. The Syriac terms for his scripture commentaries are either *tûrgāmâ* ("interpretation" or "commentary"; the root is the cognate of the Hebrew term *targum*, a translation) or *pûshāqâ* ("explanation"). It seems that

126. See Griffith, "'Faith Seeking Understanding' in the Thought of St. Ephraem the Syrian," in *Faith Seeking Understanding: Learning and the Catholic Tradition*, ed. George C. Berthold (Manchester, N.H.: St Anslems College Press, 1991), 35–55; idem, "Setting Right the Church of Syria: Saint Ephraem's Hymns against Heresies," forthcoming; Brock, *Luminous*, 43–46.

127. Griffith, '*Faith Adoring*', 33.

128. Griffith, '*Faith Adoring*', 35. The classic study is Edmund Beck, "Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephräm," *Oriens Christianus* 42 (1958): 19–40.

129. Sebastian Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 18.

the two terms are used by Ephraem interchangeably.[130] The rhythmic or artistic prose genre marks his *Homily on the Lord* and his *Letter to Publius* that treats the final judgment.[131]

The majority of Ephraem's work, and what earned him the title of greatest writer in the history of the Syriac language, is poetry. The first genre of poetry is the *mêmrâ* or "metrical homily."[132] A *mêmrâ* consists of a variable number of lines in strict isosyllabism, which in Ephraem's use is 7 + 7 syllable couplets. The *mêmrâ* is not divided into strophes or broken with refrains. While it is likely that these metrical homilies were recited in public performance, given the lack of refrains, it is also possible that the *mêmrê* were cantillated in public performance by a soloist. While Ephraem no doubt authored many *mêmrê*, contemporary scholars caution that only the six *mêmrê* on faith and the *mêmrê* on the

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130. See Sten Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca: Die Kommentare des Heiligen Ephräm des Syrers zu Genesis und Exodus mit besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer Auslegungsgeschichtliche Stellung*, Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series 6 (Lund, Sweden: CWK, 1974), 8–9.

131. On the characteristics of the artistic prose and examples of it both in the Letter to Publius and the Homily on the Lord, see S. Brock, "Ephrem's Letter to Publius," *Le Muséon* 89 (1976): 261–266. Brock notes that the rhetorical figures used are also popular among the contemporary Greek writers (like the Cappadocians). He suggests that the genre may well have originated from originally bilingual (Greek-Syriac) centers.

132. See the descriptions of Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Webers Verlag, 1922; reprinted W. de Gruyter, 1968), 40; Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem*, Studies Supplementary to Sobornost 4 (San Bernardino, Calif.: Borgo Press, 1983), 9; G. A. M. Rouwhorst, *Les Hymnes Pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 1:19; and Eric Werner, "Hebrew and Oriental Christian Metrical Hymns: A Comparison," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 23 (1950–51): 404. Werner's article first sets out themes taken up in his two-volume work, *The Sacred Bridge: the Interdependence of Liturgy and Music in Synagogue and Church During the First Millennium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959–1984). Werner has been highly criticized. The cautions issued by Peter Jeffery should be kept in mind when using Werner's work; see his "Werner's *Sacred Bridge*, Volume 2: A Review Essay," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 77 (1987): 283–298.

destruction of Nicomedia are authentic.[133] Overzealous scribes either attributed Ephraem's name to any 7 + 7 meter *mêmrâ* to accentuate his prolific production or spuriously ascribed mediocre *mêmrê* to him to garner more authority for them.

As Sebastian Brock observes, "Ephraem's reputation as a poet hangs" on his more than four hundred *madrāshê*. While the term "hymn" is commonly used to render *madrāshâ*, the *madrāshâ* genre is more akin to didactic or narrative poems or songs that have been assigned or acquired refrains or brief doxological acclamation.[134] The *madrâshê* are arranged in stanzas in isosyllabic cola, in any number of various meters. More than fifty patterns can be found in Ephraem's corpus of *madrâshê*. They usually have a tune (*qālâ*) assigned to them.[135]

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133. See Brock, *Luminous*, 18.

134. Michael Lattke, "Sind Ephraems Madrāšē Hymnen?" *Oriens Christianus* 73 (1989): 42–43. See also Rouwhorst's description, 1:16. Irénée-Henri Dalmais calls a *madrâshâ* "une cantique populaire"; see his "L'apport des Eglises syriennes à l'hymnographie chrétienne," *Orient Syrien* 2 (1957): 254. Lattke is concerned that using the term "hymn" to translate *madrāshâ* carries with it an understanding that the form and purpose is the same as Greek and Latin hymns. Thus Lattke's answers his question: "Nein, ingesamt sind es keine Hymnen wie etwa griechische oder lateinische Hymnensammlungen oder auch die von Philo ὕμνοι als bezeichneten Psalmen." He concludes that rather than present *madrāshâ* as a "species" of the "genus" hymn, a hymn is actually a species of the genus *madrāshâ* (43). Underlying this clarification is a desire to move away from the implication that the Greek and Latin "hymn" is a normative form, and that Greek and Latin cultural practice determines what qualifies as a hymn or not.

135. For descriptions of the *madrâshâ*, see Baumstark, 39, and Werner, "Metrical Hymns," 404.

A "species" of the "genus" *madrâshâ* is the *sôgîtâ*.[136] A *sôgîtâ* is distinguished by the arrangement of stanzas of four isosyllabic lines/couplets. Many *sôgyātâ* have two other characteristics: They present and are arranged as a dialogue between two personified or biblical characters (e.g., Body and Soul, Satan and Death, the Two Thieves on the Cross, the Church and the Synagogue) and are arranged as acrostics. The dialogue reflects the interpenetration the Mesopotamian contest or precedence dispute genre with the *madrâshâ*.[137] The precedence dispute typically included a short statement and notice of the judge, the disputation between the two parties, and the adjudication.[138] In the dialogue *sôgyātâ*, the two parties speak in alternating couplets, usually but not necessarily arranged in acrostic or double acrostic.[139]

The formal dispute poem gives way to a more stylized dialogue between two parties in a narrative framework with homiletic material, a dramatic dialogue. The dispute genre merges with the dramatic homily genre. The dramatic dialogue can be found as a *sôgîtâ*, *madrāshê*, *mêmrâ*, or even sometimes in prose. Brock speaks of the "Christianizing" of the

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136. This term for the genre does not appear until the eighth to ninth centuries, with the first liturgical manuscripts with hymns, though Joshua the Stylite reports that Jacob of Sarug composed *sôgyātâ*. See Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Dialogue Poems: Marginalia to a Recent Edition," *Le Muséon* 97 (1984): 32, n. 11. See also idem, "Syriac Dispute Poems: The Various Types," in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East*, ed. G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 42 (Leuven: Peeters, 1991), 110.

137. It also has merged with the *mêmrâ* and in rare instances with prose.

138. Brock, "Syriac Dialogue Poems," 32. See Karel van der Toorn, "The Ancient Near East Dialogue as a Vehicle of Critical Reflection," in *Dispute Poems*, 59–75."The Dispute Between Soul and Body: An Example of a Long-Lived Mesopotamian Literary Genre," ARAM 1 (1989): 53–64.

139. The acrostic can begin at the start or be delayed until the formal dispute opens. There are many exceptions, of course, to this generalization.

original dispute genre: Dispute becomes stylized argument, and reconciliation replaces the victory of one party over the other.[140] The genre is deployed to allow the author to delve into a spiritual or theological exploration of a biblical encounter, for example, between Mary and the Angel, Abraham and Isaac, Mary and Joseph, or most relevant here Satan and Death. Brock has delineated a typology for the dramatic dialogue poems as shown in table 1.0:[141]

Table 1.0
Taxonomy of Dramatic Dialogue Genre[142]

TYPE	CHARACTERISTICS
Type I	Formal Dialogue in Alternating Stanzas
Type II	Dialogue in Uneven Blocks
Type III	Dialogue in Bare Narrative Framework
Type IV	Narrative with Speeches, perhaps a prologue and epilogue
Type V	Narrative with speeches, but with homiletic material added throughout, usually as a prologue and epilogue

140. See "Syriac Dialogue Poems," 34, and "Syriac Dispute Poems," 114. See also Brock, "Dialogue Hymns of the Syriac Churches," *Sobornost* 5 (1983): 35–45.

141. Sebastian Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 229 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1987), 135–147.

142. Adapted from Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," 143.

Liturgical Context of the *Madrāshê*

While the *mêmrâ* and the *madrāshâ/sôgîtâ* are acknowledged as literary genres, the fact is that they have distinctive liturgical and catechetical characteristics.[143] However, it is difficult to ascertain their place in the liturgy in the era of their composition. A tantalizing clue comes from Saint Jerome (d. 419) in his *On Famous Men*. Jerome makes note of Ephraem:

> Ephrem, a deacon of the Church of Edessa, composed many a sermon in Syriac, and he achieved so much fame, that after the reading of Scriptures in public in certain churches, his compositions were read aloud.[144]

Further witness comes from a description of Ephraem's work with the choirs of women and children:

> In Edessa he instituted societies of women, taught members the *madrashe* . . . and they gathered in church on the feasts of the Lord, on Sundays and on the feasts of martyrs.[145]

The *madrāshê* required a trained choir or soloists to excute the various *qālê* (refrains) assigned to the hymns. The assembly would most likely have participated in the recurring refrain, usually doxological in character.

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143. Most recently Griffith, '*Fides Adorans*', 10–13, has emphasized the liturgical and catechetical context of Ephraem's hymns and homilies. These occasional pieces were then collected by theme and melody by his disciples and later users. "His texts were used for the most part by busy churchmen like himself, who had liturgies to celebrate or catechetical classes to teach" (12). By the sixth century, the compiliations were essentially in the form we have them today (12).

144. Jerome, *Liber de Viris Illustribus*, chapt. 115. In *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1845), 23:707. "Ephrem, Edessenae ecclesiae diaconus, multa Syro sermone composuit, et ad tantam venit claritudinem, ut post lectionem Scripturarum publice in quibusdam ecclesiis eius scripta recitentur."

145. Quoted in Johannes Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1983), 78. On Ephraem's estimation of the role of women's singing, see Jacob of Sarug's *mêmrâ* on Ephraem in *A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob of Serugh*, Patrologia Orientalis 47 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), nos. 96–98.

In order to trace the liturgical setting of the hymns and homilies, synagogue hymns have been suggested as a "useful point of comparison."[146] There are formal and literary similarities of the liturgical composition known as the *piyyûṭ* that make analogies to the hymns and homilies of Ephraem possible. Many *piyyûṭîm* exhibit biblical parallelism, strict and formal rhythm, isosyllabism, symmetical couplets, and acrostic.[147] Some *piyyûṭim* also have devices that are akin to the style and spirit of midrash.

However, two characteristics of *piyyûṭim* suggest that the comparison is tangential. First, formal *piyyûṭim* are late in appearance. The earliest witness to *piyyûṭim* is the sixth century.[148] Jewish scholars do point out that poets were experimenting "with highly stylized poetic formations of prayer," possibly as early as the pre-fourth-century tannaitic period.[149] The *piyyûṭim* included reference to the occasion, the liturgical context, and interpretation of the Scripture readings assigned.[150] Some had short refrains for the assembly, other more

146. Griffith, *'Faith Adoring,'* 10.

147. J. Yahalom, "*Piyyûṭ* as Poetry," in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Philadelphia, Pa.: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1987), 111–125. See also J. Schirmann, "Hebrew Liturgical Poetry and Christian Hymnody," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 44 (1953–54): 123–161; and Werner, "Christian Metrical Hymns," 397–432.

148. See Werner, "Christian Metrical Hymns," 400.

149. Lawrence Hoffman, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1979), 66. See also Stefan C. Rief, "The Early History of Jewish Worship," in *The Making of Jewish and Christian Worship*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and Lawrence Hoffman, Two Liturgical Traditions 1 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 110–112.

150. See Eliyahu Schleifer, "Jewish Liturgical Music from the Bible to Hasidism," in *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience*, ed. Lawrence Hoffman and Janet R. Walton, Two Liturgical Traditions 3 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 30.

complicated responses for a choir.[151] The late appearance of the *piyyûṭim* indicates that Hebrew-speaking liturgical poets might well have been influenced by the already developed Syriac genres, perhaps drawing from common sources or appropriating a common cultural expressions.[152]

Second, the *piyyûṭim* had a different liturgical origin and function than Syriac liturgical poetry. They seem to have originated in reaction to the standardization of prayer in the Jewish liturgy. While the content of the *piyyûṭim* appears to be shaped by the system of biblical readings, they "represent a rebellion against standardized fixed prayer."[153] In reaction to fixed-text prayer, the *piyyûṭim* were added on to fixed prayers or replaced them. They allowed for more elaborate prayer, responding to a lyric devotional impetus that the fixed texts mitigated against.

In contrast to these particular liturgical conditions, the liturgical poetry of the Syriac-speaking churches evolved as intercalation between readings and prayers in the eucharistic liturgy and office serving both homiletic interpretation and doxological expansion.[154] In the development of the liturgy of the word, songs and hymns emerged as a way to engage the assembly's attention with a twofold purpose. First, it would flesh out themes and images of

151. Schleifer, 30.

152. In this regard the anti-Christian element of some of the *piyyûṭim* is interesting. See W. J. Van Bekkum, "Anti-Christian Polemics in Hebrew Liturgical Poetry *(Piyyuṭ)* of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries," in *Early Christian Poety: A Collection of Essays*, ed. J. Den Boeft and A. Hilhorst (Leiden; Brill, 1993), 297–308.

153. Yahalom, 111.

154. See S. Salaville, *Les Liturgies des Eglises Orientaux* (Paris, 1932), 82.

the Scriptures so that the people would more readily be able to apply their fruits. Second, they served to keep the assembly's attention and prevent fatigue through music and singing.[155]

With regard to the liturgical setting of the Syriac poetry, an etymological connection exists bewteen the *madrāshê* and the Jewish *midrashim* of the *darshân*, or preacher, who had an active role in synagogal activity.[156] The root *drsh* in Hebrew means "to study," "to search," "to go in pursuit of"; in short, "it can be taken to mean 'account,' that is, giving an account of what is written."[157] The affinities of Ephraem's work with midrash will be explored further after setting out specific examples of his *madrāshê* below.

With regard to the actual performance of the texts, a lead comes from later use of the dialogue *sôgyātâ*, whose highly dramatic character would lend itself to a choral performance. There is one documented case of a *sôgîtâ* inspiring a liturgical mime. In the East Syrian Church on Monday after Pasch, the *sôgîtâ* of the cherub and penitent thief at the gate of paradise is prescribed.[158] A young boy acts out the penitent thief's approach to gates of paradise by approaching deacons with torches at the entrance to the *bêmâ*. The deacons prevent his entrance, and then, following the plot of the *sôgîtâ*, the boy spies the cross (kept on the small altar called the *gāgôltâ* on the *bêmâ*). He shows the cross to the deacons, who

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155. See Sarhad Y. Hermiz Jammo, *La Structure de la Messe Chaldéene du Début jusqu'à l'Anaphore. Etude historique*, OCA 207 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1979), 113–123.

156. See Avigdor Shinan, "Sermons, Targums, and the Reading from Scriptures in the Ancient Synagogue," in *Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, 97–110.

157. Gerald L. Bruns, "Midrash and Allegory: The Beginnings of Scriptural Interpretation," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Havard Univeristy Press, 1987), 628.

158. See account in Brock, "Dialogue Hymns," 35–36.

allow him to pass. Whether this is the remant of an earlier tradition where many of the other *sôgyātâ* might also have been performed as liturgical drama or a later development toward more mimetic or dramatic liturgy is uncertain because there is no firm evidence.

Ephraem's Plain Prose

The descent to Sheol appears at several points in Ephraem's plain prose.[159] This section will examine the *Prose Refutations* and the Commentary on the Diatessaron. In the first instance, theological controversy occasions use of the descent motif to give a more integral account of salvation history. In the second, the descent motif figures in scriptural commentary in instances where the Scriptures are silent about the descent.

PROSE REFUTATIONS. Ephraem's adversaries had difficulty with the notion of the resurrection of the body, which occasioned Ephraem's defense of the faith of the 'great Church'. In order to explain the final resurrection, Ephraem appeals to the descent to Sheol. Writing against Marcion, Ephraem asserts that Jesus indeed died, descended to Sheol and ascended from it. Marcion (and his followers) does not believe this so, and thus does not confess the quickening of the dead.[160]

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159. On the theme of the descent in Ephraem, see Javier Teixidor, "Muerte, Cielo y Seol en San Efrén," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 27 (1961): 82–114; idem, "Le Thème de la Descente aux Enfers chez Saint Éphrem," *L'Orient Syrien* 6 (1961): 25–40; and Jouko Martikainen, *Das Böse und der Teufel in der Theologie Ephraems des Syrers: eine systematisch-theologische Untersuchung* (Åbo: Stiftelsens för Åbo Akademi Forskningsinstitut, 1978), 86–97.

160. *St Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan*, ed. C. W. Mitchell, A. A. Bevan, and F. C. Burkitt (London: Williams and Norgate, 1921), 2:81. The Syriac is garbled at this point, but the editors advocate the reading ܚܝܬ ܡܝܬܐ (see xxxvii, n. 1). Also, throughout the anti-Marcionite treatises, Jesus is called ܝܫܘ rather than ܝܫܘܥ.

Further discussion of the descent to Sheol appears in the refutation of Bar Dayṣān.[161] Bar Dayṣān rejects the bodily resurrection of Jesus. According to Ephraem, Bar Dayṣān examines the scriptural verse, "All those who keep my word will not taste death forever," and observes that "all who have kept it have died."[162] Ephraem argues that Bar Dayṣān is sadly confused on several points. First, Jesus rose bodily from Sheol, a truth to which the "watchers" (*ʿîrê*) bear witness as does Thomas who touched the body of the risen Jesus. Thomas could not have touched Jesus if Jesus's soul alone rose. Bar Dayṣān points out that if all bodies died in Adam, it is right that they should be raised. But, but according to his objection, the Lord only brought up the souls with him. So, Jesus went to Sheol and taught them there, so that their souls would not be hindered and would go to the Kingdom. Ephraem objects to Bar Dayṣān's reasoning that only the soul will go forth from Sheol. Christ, he says, painted an example, engraved a likeness, and fashioned a mirror by his very body. Jesus suffered, but was victorious and put on glory. Thus all who fight will conquer, and all who conquer will be crowned. Bar Dayṣān, Ephraem asserts, is mistaken when he sees that only the body of our Lord rose, and the rest of the dead were souls. Rather, Ephraem says, in Christ life reigns where death once did and will after time reign over all. Ephraem uses leaven imagery to explain how life will spread through all of Sheol and conquer Death:

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161. See Mitchell et al., 2:148–169.

162. *Against Bardaisan* 20; Syriac text in Mitchell et al., 2:164, ll. 20–24. The verse in question is John 8:51, which in the Peshitta reads, " . . . will never see death." Also, in the gospel account, the Jewish leaders protest that Abraham and all the prophets died.

> His leaven that quickens spread in the whole lump of all the dead since it is kneaded in the womb of Sheol. For if after nine hundred years the leaven of death had reigned in us, behold soon after his leaven of life conquers mortality.[163]

Just as the leaven raises bread, so life will raise the dead. The descent to Sheol is crucial to Ephraem's argument about bodily resurrection of the dead as well as the redemption of Adam. The fact that Ephraem's opponents had subverted the descent to Sheol or denied it gives all the more reason for its consistent emphasis and concrete explanation.

COMMENTARY ON THE DIATESSARON. While there is some scholarly debate about the authenticity of the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* as part of Ephraem's corpus, "even if it may not have come from his pen," it expresses his point of view.[164] Taking up the anointing in Bethany after the raising of Lazarus, the commentator notes that Jesus "raised his friend and buried himself through the mystical symbol of oil *(wqbar hwā napsheh b'rāz meshḥā)* (17:8)."[165] He exposed Death's loss of power when he called back Lazarus after four days.

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163. Mitchell et al., 2:168, ll. 15–24.

164. Quote from Griffith, '*Adoring*,' 16. Dom Leloir argued that it is authentic Ephraem; see *Doctrines et méthodes de s. Éphrem d'après son commentaire de l'Évangile concordant* CSCO 220 (Louvain: Peeters, 1961). Edmund Beck argued that it is from Ephraem's school; see inter alia "Ephräm und der Diatessaronkommentar im Abschnitt über die Wunder beim Tode Jesu am Kreuz," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993): 104–119. He concludes, "daß Ephräm nicht der Verfasser des Kommentars war"(119). See also William Petersen, "Some Remarks on the Integrity of Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 20 , ed. E. A. Livingston (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 197–202. For a description of the literary styles of the commentary, see Pierre Yousif, "Les formes littéraires du Commentaire du Diatessaron de Saint Éphrem de Nisibe," in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984*, 83–92.

165. Syriac text *Saint Éphrem Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant. Texte Syriaque (Manuscrit Chester Beatty 709)*, ed. and trans. Louis Leloir, Chester Beatty Monographs 8 (Dublin: Hodges Figgis and Co., Ltd., 1963), 198.

When Mary poured oil over Jesus' head, he was "buried." However, "Sheol . . . would not keep him forever *(lshyôl dlaw dalʿālam kāymā ʿlawhy)* (17:8)."[166]

The commentary addresses a disputed point concerning the thief to whom Jesus promised that he would be with Jesus this day in paradise. By the water and blood flowing from Jesus' side, the thief received the sprinkling that brought him remission of his sins. Thus, because he had expressed his faith in Jesus, the thief, a victorious sinner went immediately to Paradise, not at the end of the world. Adam who was first had sinned and closed the gates of Paradise. Here a sinner, now just, reopens the gates. The Judeans had chosen a robber over Christ; Christ has chosen a robber over them to enter paradise (20:25–26).[167] The commentary does not take up the temporal gap created here: If Jesus promised the thief that "this day" he would be in Paradise with Jesus, how does one account for the three-day stay in Sheol?

In the spiritual meditation on the death of Christ, the descent into Sheol is considered as an integral part of the event. In 20:30, the cry of Jesus on the cross ("My God, my God!") vanquishes death. The commentator explains: "Through one's fetters many who were bound in hell became unbound" *(bazowmk' or kapeal kayin i dž̌oxs mioyn kapanawk'n arjakeal linein)*.[168] In

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166. Leloir, 198.

167. There is a lacuna in the Syriac version from 18:3 to 21:4; these sections are preserved in Armenian. See *Saint Éphrem Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant, Version Arménienne*, ed. Louis Leloir, CSCO 137, Scriptores Armeniaci 1 (Louvain Impriméric Orientaliste, 1953), p. 298–299. (English text available in Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, Journal of Semitic Studies Supplements 2 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], 306–307.)

168. Leloir, p. 302, ll. 23–24. *Բազումք որ կապեալ կային ի դժոխս միոյն կապանաւքն արձակեալ լինեին.*

section 32 the activities of those who crucified Jesus are contrasted with Jesus' salvific action in Sheol. While they bound him, he unbound the dead; the dead slay the Living One, but the slain one raises the dead to life. Death stole him and put him in the tomb, but Jesus stole his stealer *(gołac'aw zgołn iwr)*.[169] The famished death hastened to swallow Jesus, but it just as quickly had to return it because it tasted life (20:32). In a Syriac fragment of the commentary that reflects on Jesus'death, chapter 21, section 1 mentions that Jesus was not abandoned in Sheol.[170]

Ephraem's Artistic Prose

SERMO DE DOMINO NOSTRO. Ephraem's *Homily on Our Lord* presents many of his christological and trinitarian themes "in evocative and highly nuanced theological idioms of native Syriac-speaking Christians."[171] The homily has fifty-nine sections of uneven length. The central focus is an interpretation of Luke 17, the meeting of Christ and the sinful woman, but there are many digressions. Of particular relevance in the homily is the beginning, which presents an elaborate christological synthesis that develops the descent to Sheol.

The opening sections of the prose homily present the unfolding of salvation history as ordered to the descent into Sheol. In section one, Jesus journeys from Sheol "to tread a

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169. Leloir, p. 304, l. 27. *գողացաւ զգողն իւր.*

170. See T. Baarda, "A Syriac Fragment of Mar Ephraem's Commentary on the Diatessaron," *New Testament Studies* 8 (1961–62): 287–300. The Armenian does not mention Sheol/Hell.

171. Introduction to "Homily on Our Lord," *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, ed. Matthews and Amar, 269.

path from Sheol, which cheats everyone, to the kingdom, which rewards everyone."[172] The resurrection is the pledge *(rahbônâ)* that all mortals would be lead out of Sheol. Ephraem emphasizes the physical body of Christ and speak of a series of "begettings" of Jesus:

> The Father begot Him, and through Him He made all creation. Flesh begot him, and in his flesh he put passions to death. Baptism begot him, that through him it might make (our) stains white. Sheol begot him to have her treasuries depoiled by Him.[173]

Death trampled the Lord, Ephraem explains, but the Lord trod a path for all beyond death. Ephraem's description of the death and descent in section three situates these events in the scope of salvation history:

> But on the cross he called out and brought the dead out of Sheol, contrary to death's will. With the very weapon that death had used to kill him, he gained victory over death. . . . Death killed natural life, but supernatural life killed death. Since death was unable to devour him without a body or Sheol swallow him without flesh, he came to a virgin to provide himself with a means [of transport, *rkûbâ*] to Sheol.[174]

Just as a donkey brought Jesus through the gates of Jerusalem, so with his body he enters Sheol. Ephraem picks up the alimentary imagery again to explain how Jesus brings life to all:

> When death came confidently, as usual, to feed on mortal fruit, life, the killer of death, was lying in wait, so that when death swallowed (life) with no apprehension, it would vomit it out and many others with it. So the medicine of life flew down from above and joined himself [*ētmazag*, lit. "was united," "commingled,"] to that mortal fruit, the body. . . . Death vomited up the lives of many which it had greedily swallowed because of a single fruit which it had ravenously swallowed.[175]

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172. English translation from Matthews and Amar, 274. On the importance of the way *(ûrḥâ)*, see E. Beck, "Das Bild vom Weg mit Meilensteiner und Herbergen bei Ephraem," *Oriens Christianus* 65 (1981): 1–39.

173. Translation from Matthew and Amar, 277. Syriac text in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermo De Domino Nostro*, ed. Edmund Beck, CSCO 270, Scriptores Syri 116 (Louvain: Imprimérie Orientaliste, 1966), p. 2, l. 18–20.

174. Matthews and Amar, 278; Syriac in Beck, p. 3, ll. 3–12.

175. Mattews and Amar, 279; Syriac in Beck, p. 3, ll. 23–27.

Ephraem explains quite graphically that when one eats something disagreable, one vomits out both what is agreeable and disagreable. Likewise, the medicine of life sours the stomach of death who vomits out Jesus and all the dead it had been storing up.[176] Ephraem places great emphasis on the body of Jesus: "He clothed himself with the body of mortal Adam. . . . Those who buried you were raised up by you because of your body."[177]

LETTER TO PUBLIUS. A further example of Ephraem's artistic prose, the *Letter to Publius* is an extended meditation on the final judgment.Through Ephraem's favored image of the mirror, he leads Publius to a deeper reflection on Gehenna and the day of judgment. Gehenna is the place of torment, flames, weeping, and gnashing of teeth (no. 3).[178] The letter also includes an exhortation to let the mind descend to Sheol. Jesus is extolled as the one "who brings to nought the power of iniquity, who weakens the hand of Sheol, who breaks off the sting of evil, who brings out the captives into the light, who raises up those prostrate in perdition, who removes the darkness and makes them worthy of rest."[179] The wicked are separated from the good by a deep chasm (no. 14).

Ephraem asks, "Where is Adam, and where are your ancestors who luxuriated in the womb of Eden" (no. 17)? He invites Publius to explore the depths and seek out the fate of

176. For further discussion of a "medicinal-pharmaceutical soteriology," see Markwart Herzog, *»Descensus ad Inferos« Eine religionsphilosophische Untersuchung der Motive und Interpretationen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der monographischen Literatur seit dem 16. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurter Theologische Studien 53 (Frankfurt Am Main: Josef Knecht, 1997), 280–284; idem, "Christus medicus, apothecarius, samaritanus, balneator. Motive einer «Medizinisch-pharmazeutischen Soteriologie»," *Geist und Leben* 67 (1994): 414–434.

177. Matthews and Amar, 284–285; Syriac in Beck, p. 8, ll. 1–20.

178. Text and translation in Brock, "Letter to Publius," 274–275.

179. Brock, "Letter to Publius," 288.

"the ten generation from Adam to Noah . . . the men of Sodom . . . the generations from that time up till today, where are they?"[180] Ephraem then invites Publius; "Come, I will take you to the darkest graveyards and come down with me in your mind to lowest Sheol and I will show you there kings. . . ."[181] Their state in life, with their treasure, their armies, and their weapons, is undone, and they lie in mourning, glimpsing over the chasm to Paradise, which causes them great lament (see nos. 19–24). As Brock notes, this is Ephraem's "speculation on the true meaning of Gehenna in psychological terms, dropping the traditional imagery."[182] Ephraem concludes his exhortation explaining that this is what he has seen in the living mirror, "from Adam up to the end of the world, and from the resurrection until the day of the just judgment."[183]

Ephraem's *Mêmrê*

It is reasonable to think that Ephraem composed a number of *mêmrê*, and a large number have been attributed to him. However their authenticity is far from certain, as mentioned above. What emerges as significant for the descent tradition is the series of hymns attributed to Ephraem on Holy Week. These will be treated below under the heading "pseudo-Ephraemian."

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180. Brock, "Letter to Publius," 288.

181. Brock, "Letter to Publius," 289.

182. Brock, "Letter to Publius," 272.

183. Brock, "Letter to Publius," 294.

Ephraem's *Madrāshê*: The *Carmina Nisibena* and the Paschal Hymns

THE NISIBENE HYMNS. The *Nisibene Hymns* (NH) *(madrāshê danṣîbîn)* are a series of seventy-seven *madrāhsê*.[184] The first twelve deal with the siege and deliverance of Nisibis. Hymns 13 to 21 treat the bishops of Nisibis (James [d. 338], Babu [d. 346], Volgeses [d. 361], and Abraham [347–?]).[185] Hymns 25 to 30 deal with Edessa and 31 to 34 with Harran. The remainder of the NH, 35 to 77, take up in great detail and fervor the theme of Christ's descent to Sheol using a number of genres, including use of the dispute dialogue first between Satan and Death (hymns 52–59) and later between Death and humanity (hymns 65–68). Following the opinion of Edmund Beck, hymns 1–21 were composed between 359–363, hymns 25–30 date to the 370s. The rest he dates to the later years of Ephraem's life.[186]

Because the NH have the most extensive development of the descent theme they are considerably important for understanding the Ephraemian development of the descent motif. Thus, they merit extended synopsis and assessment. Table 1.2 gives a general thematic overview.

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184. Edmund Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena I*, CSCO 218, Scriptores Syri 92 (Louvain: CSCO, 1961), contains hymns 1–34. Idem, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena II*, CSCO 240, Scriptores Syri 102 (Louvain: CSCO, 1963), contains 35–77.

185. See Jean M. Fiey, "Les Évêques de Nisibe au temps de St. Éphrem," *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973): 123–135.

186. Jouko Martikainen argues that many hymns (at least hymns 52–68) of the so-called "second part" could be dated to Ephraem's time in Nisibis. See "Some Remarks about the Carmina Nisibena as a Literary and Theological Source," *Symposium Syriacum 1972*, OCA 197 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1974), 348. The division of the hymns into two parts, historical (1–34) and doctrinal (35–77) stems from Beck's editing them into two division. They all appear together in one collection by the time of the basic manuscript in the sixth century. See Martikainen's remarks on p. 345.

Table 1.2
Themes in *Nisibene Hymns*, nos. 34–77

THEME	HYMN NUMBER IN BECK[187]
Descent of Christ to Sheol	34–42
Body and Soul at General Resurrection	43–51
Disputes	52–68
Death and Satan	52–60
Death and Humanity	61–68
General Resurrection and Immortality	69–77

Synopsis. Hymn 35 opens the cycle.[188] Sin, Sheol, Death, and the Evil One (Satan) ponder in grief the power of Jesus. They had had many victories but saw nothing like Jesus through whom God makes the dead live by his grace (v. 7). The Evil One frets that many a prophet and righteous one had entered Sheol; all human beings have the odor of mortality. Jesus put on the body of Adam, but their "leaven had no power over him" *(ḥmîrān lâ shlaṭ beh)*. Jesus' humanity is commingled *(ʾetmazgat)* with his divinity. The Evil One explains he had never seen this before and then recounts how even the life of Jesus made him afraid (vv. 9–14). Death is called on to testify that Jesus' death should be no cause for concern, for no one has come forth from Sheol. The host of Sheol then warns the Evil One that the "Son of Mary is laying waste to the fortified cities" *(bar maryam shābê karkê)* (v. 19).

In Hymn 36 the scene shifts. Death admonishes Jesus that he should get out of Sheol, and if he has any intentions of seeking Adam he especially should leave. No one can open the mouth of Sheol, which holds on forever. Death derides Jesus, but the voice of the Lord

187. Beck, *Carmina II.*

188. Syriac texts in Beck, *Carmina II.* Cited by page and line.

resounds and bursts the graves. Light shines in the dark of Sheol, and the Watchers (*'îrê)* enter and bring out the dead. Death is confounded: The lamb slain in Egypt filled Sheol with the first born but this lamb robs Sheol of its dead (v. 12). Death tries to shut the gates of Sheol, but the despoiling has already begun. "A medicine of life" has entered (v. 14). To stay its despoiling, Death offers Adam as a hostage *(hmayrâ)*.[189]

The events cause Death and Sheol to mourn (Hymn 37). Sheol is described as being in great pain because the dead came out of its insides. Death recalls the words of Isaiah that a nation would come forth from the earth after a day's labor (Is 66:8). Isaiah had also said that a virgin would bring him forth from her womb:

> . . . Behold, then! The virgin begot him
> And barren Sheol begot him; two wombs against nature
> Have been transformed by him, the virgin and Sheol both.
> The virgin by his birth, he gladdened,
> But Sheol he saddened and grieved by his resurrection. (37:4)[190]

Ezekiel saw bones come together. Now Death sees the bones of Sheol come together, for Jesus has power over all. A series of antitheses follow: Lazarus's sisters wept at his going in the grave; Death weeps at Lazarus's departure. The families of the dead bewailed their death; now Death bewails their life. Death caused suffering in life; now Death suffers because the dead have left Sheol. The rest of the *madrāshâ* continues by affirming God's omnipotence. Death remains confounded at the events:

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189. In antiquity, a hostage was not seized with violence, but handed over as a pledge to honor and agreement. See Sebastian Brock, "Christ 'The Hostage': A Theme in the East Syriac Liturgical Tradition and its Origins," in *Logos: Festschrift für Luise Abramowski zum 8. Juli 1993*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 67 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Guyter, 1993), 473–474.

190. Beck, p. 16, ll. 9–14.

Lo! The captor enters Sheol. / I used to capture everyone;
A captive whom I captured has captured me! (38:1)[191]

In hymn 39, Death admits more honestly that others plundered before, namely Elijah and Elisha; however, none has been like the Son of Mary. The hymn stikes a parallel between the exodus from Egypt in Nisan and the exodus of the dead from Sheol in Nisan by the first-born of the dead, Jesus. There was a great feast in Sheol when Satan stirred up dissension, and Death swallowed up the Korites. Now, the crucified one causes Death to fear. He slew Jesus on the cross, but now Jesus slays him. The *madrāshâ* continues comparing and contrasting Death's gains and losses, concluding that at the sight of the Son of Adam Sheol trembles. Jesus lays bare the "wiles of the cunning one" (41:1 [response]). Death thinks that he is still the powerful one because he slew him on the cross. Satan comes to see Jesus cast into Sheol like all human beings. The Evil One wants Death to open up Sheol so they can mock the dead Jesus. But when Death opens the gates, they are blinded by the light of the Lord.

Hymns 43 to 46 take the final resurrection as the central theme. The just repose in Sheol. However, Sheol will be empty: The body is not abandoned, but will rise (Hymn 43). Hymn 44 echoes that the body and soul will share the joy of the resurrection. Hymn 46 emphasizes to Bar Dayṣān's confoundment that the Savior came in a body and took flesh. Since the Savior always heals the whole person, body and soul will rise, just as Jonah was delivered whole. Ephraem sees signs of the resurrection in the Bible, the sacraments, and in nature. Hymn 47 treats the resurrection of the body, for the dead ones remain alive to the

191. Beck, p. 19, ll. 8–9.

Lord. Hymn 48 affirms that the dust in Sheol can be refashioned into a body at the sign of his coming. The water of the sea may be a source of death, but fish live in it. So, too, ones who can live dwell in dust. This hymn then contrasts the righteous in Sheol with the plight of sinners in Gehenna.

Hymn 49 points in an important line to the significance of the plan of salvation: ". . . If he did not put on our body, how could he have tasted our death? (p. 64, ll. 20–21). It explains that a living one could never be enslaved in Sheol. The body enters there when it is dead, and while fire consumes, Sheol keeps body intact. The hymn points to the visible pledges of the resurrection. The body will find its companion and rejoice. This line of thought continues in hymn 50, where Jesus explains the mystical symbols that are in Sheol. In contrast to that extinguished lamp, he was a lighted lamp.[192] Hymn 51 argues against Bar Dayṣān's blasphemy that the body cannot rise.

The formal dispute between Satan and Death takes place in hymns 52 to 60. They expose each other, show how weak they are. Sin and Sheol counsel them to work together (55:17). Death turns on the Evil One in hymn 59 and urges him to confess Jesus the Lord. Satan departs from the scene, but Death continues. First, he indicts human beings for their weeping and mourning. He points out that while he waited patiently for Adam, Cain opened the gates of Sheol with his sword that slew Abel. This history of violence and murder leads Death to exclaim:

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192. There is the beginning of an acrostic here.

> Wail over yourselves, on account of how hateful you are, and you hate me!
> From now on, Sheol will wail over you, O murderers!"(61:25)[193]

Hymn 62 makes an intriguing point for the descent motif: Though the dead go down in disorder to Sheol they will come forth in order: prophets, the apostles, and holy fathers (62:25–30). The refrain *('ônîtâ)* to hymn 63 keeps the outcome of the disputations clear: "Glory to you Voice that gives life to the dead in Sheol, for they come up and are heralds to the Son who makes all things live."[194]

The refrain for hymn 65 (an acrostic to verse 17) shifts attention to the rescue of Adam: "Glory to you who descended and plunged toward Adam, pulled him out of the depths of Sheol and brought him in to Eden."[195] All human beings are in the image of Adam (65:1). A dispute bewteen Humanity and Death begins. Humanity warns Death: "The son of Adam rescued the glory of Adam and put it on."[196] Humanity shows Death signs from nature that reveal life coming from death: chicks come from the egg and locusts from the dust. In Hymn 66 Death silences humanity, and Death speaks. In Hymn 67 Death indicts the People, i.e., the Jews. Death tries to save itself by arguing that the real foe is the Jews.[197] Death rehearses

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193. Beck, p. 95, ll. 21–22.

194. Beck, p. 99, ll. 4– 5.

195. Beck, p. 102, ll.17–18.

196. Beck, p. 103, ll. 18.

197. Cf. 57, where Death attempts to blame the Jews when disputing the Evil One. I disagree with P. Tanios Bou Monsour's interpretation of this hymn in his *La Pensée symbolique de Saint Ephrem le Syrien*, Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit 16 (Kaslik, Lebanon: Université Saint-Esprit, 1988), 285–286. The hymn summons images of other deaths—Jeremiah, the consumption of children, etc.— to make the Jews out to be disgraceful murders. In light of this, Sheol and Death are upheld as more just or at least their complicity attenuated by the actions of the Jews. Bou Monsour ignores this blunt invective against the Jews: "Non qu'Ephrem veuille nier la réalité des enfers; son

a history of the Jew's disgrace and argues that Sheol and Death are more merciful. Humanity responds to Death's invective, and they argue further (hymn 68).

Hymn 69 begins an exploration of the aspects of the economy of salvation. In the mystery of creation, God felt sorrow having wonderfully created Adam, knowing that he would turn away, that the beauty of this creation would be cut down by Death. To respond to Adam's desire to become God, God sent the Son who put on Adam. Through his cross and death, he reveals the great mystery. Praise comes from the first time from the mouths of those in Sheol (v. 24). The allusion reverses the OT image where those in Sheol do not praise God.

Hymn 71 contemplates the mystery of the resurrection, which has been announced through the prophets and the righteous ones: "If Moses and Samuel are standing, this shows that they are alive."[198] Other OT figures include Enoch, Elijah, Abel, seven brothers slaughtered like lambs, Josiah, and Jonah (" . . . Our loved one went down to Sheol / and arose from it like Jonah did" [71:16]).[199]

Hymn 72 explains that baptism is the promise that Death has ended for the person who puts on the Living One who give life to all.[200] As for those not baptized, how could God

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souci est ici d'attirer l'attention sur d'autres enfers et sur une autre mort, invisibles, et perceptibles seulement grâce à la Parole de Dieu."

198. Beck, p. 116, l. 13.

199. Beck, p. 118, ll. 17–18.

200. Verse 2; Beck, p. 119, 13–14.

reject Abraham after his death for either his love or his justice?[201] Similar questions are posed for Isaac, the prophets, Lot, and the seven martyrs (2 Mc 7:1-42). Verse 19 argues:

> The martyrs were consumed by fire / the righteous were drowned.
> The ascetics were slain by swords / the prophets were stoned.
> The apostles were crucified. / Now how could the Just One refuse a myriad times
> their trust?[202]

As Hymn 73 explains, God will raise the dead up. God makes good on promises and what God owes. God is just and will not offend the just. In a quasi-litanic form hymn 74 pleads for the Lord to save all human beings, for in life they may have done good, but in death it has been undone. Hymn 75 laments over the effects of death, then moves to praise the One who strangles death (v. 20). Hymn 76 picks up earlier themes: the Lord's face makes Sheol vomit (v. 2), and his body is the medicine of life (v. 6).[203] The lament over the inevitability of death and its effects is tempered by the hope and consolation that the Lord has promised resurrection. The final hymn of the cycle affirms that God orders all. Death will come, but so will resurrection.

Assessment. Two questions mark this assessment. First, why does an extended treatment of the descent and final resurrection motif appear in a series of historical hymns? Second, what has become of the contours of the descent motif in this series?

The title of this series of hymns relates them to the historical situation of the successive seiges and deliverances of Nisibis (338, 346, and 350). How does the historical

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201. Verse 3; Beck, p. 119, l. 15.

202. Beck, p. 122, ll. 13–16.

203. See Beck, p. 131, ll. 22–23 and 132, l. 12.

treatment in the first thirty-four hymns relate with the theme of the descent to Sheol and the final resurrection? Jouko Martikainen has suggested a compelling theological reading.[204] Rather than understanding the NH as two separate collections, historical and doctrinal, they need to be considered as an integrated whole.Thus the descent notif becomes the primary vehicle for Ephraem to expound the theological meaning of the sack of Nisibis that was taken up in the first set of hymns. The controlling metaphor is that Nisibis had been delivered from Sheol.[205] By using the descent motif Ephraem interprets the military happening in terms of the spiritual. Martikainen summarizes:

> The Enemy—the Persians are not only military adversaries, they are "unclean ones" (NH 6:5-9)—-are outside the city as the Devil and his company are outside the gates of Sheol (41:15-16). Christ's cross defeats the attacking Persians in the breach of the wall (2:5, 16-19, 11;14) in the same way as his theophany or perhaps better to say—his glorious cross—overcomes the "Left" through opening the gate of Sheol. The Enemies came in order to open the walls and invade "the cities," i.e. Nisibis and Sheol. But the "One of three days" is there . . . and the Enemies are defeated in the front of Nisibis as well as before the gate of Sheol (2:5, 41:16). [206]

What emerges from consideration of the extensive hymnic meditations of Ephraem is that the NH 34–77 is not a confused accumulation or aimless proliferation of images. Rather, Ephraem has assimilated and transformed the motif to interpret the historical circumstances of the day. The descent and harrowing of Sheol is the focal text that keeps control over the

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204. What follows is from Martikainen, "Some Remarks."

205. This is actually Ephraem's conclusion, as Martikainen points out. Ephraem declares this in the *Hymns Against Julian*, 2:26.

206. Martikainen, 349.

whole.[207] Ephraem contructs a world in which he is able to sustain a strong eschatological vision resurrection and immortality of the Christian.[208]

The descent motif has given rise to an intersecting of genres and interweaving of systems of imagery. The initial narrative development seen in Aphrahat reached a level of extensive development. It involves not only a more complex narrative, but the amplification of characters. NH 34–77 weaves together dramatic dialogue, hymnic, and homiletic material in a single frame or "collection." In the course of this collection, Ephraem deploys violence, irony, and even comedy to highten the appeal of his theological interpretation of historical events. He expands the semantic possibility of the individual images associated with the descent to Sheol—medicine, leaven, light, birth, exodus, pillage, resurrection, ancestors, nature—establishing relationships and mediating a distinct soteriology and eschatology.

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207. This notion of a controlling text is from Laurent Jenny, "The Strategy of the Form," in *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov, trans. R. Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 39–40.

208. Ephraem's theological interpretation of political and historical events has an interesting parallel in the West. In a fascinating study, Kevin Roddy ("Politics and Religion in Late Antiquity: The Roman Imperial *Adventus* Ceremony and the Christian Myth of the Harrowing of Hell," forthcoming) suggests that the development of the elaborate harrowing of Hell in the West has striking similarities to the Roman Imperial *adventus* ceremony that has the characteristics of the arrival of the emperor in conquered territory, his clemency resulting in the liberation of prisoners and punishment of the enemies. The connection to Hellenistic and Roman public ceremony gives the descent a political significance. (See Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986]). Roddy does not take up any Syriac evidence beyond acknowledging that the descent motif may have its origins in Syria. The conquering and siege of a Middle Eastern city would require destroying its gates, much like the descent motif pictures Christ destroying gate or bars.

PASCHAL HYMNS.The paschal hymns of Ephraem, by which is meant the *Hymns on Unleavened Bread, On the Crucifixion*, and *On the Resurrection*, have been studied in detail by Gerard A. M. Rouwhorst.[209]

Before taking up these hymns, I will address the distinctive quality of the Syriac-speaking world's yearly paschal observance, which influences the prominence and contours of the descent motif in the paschal hymns. The early Church had two distinct ways of reckoning Pasch. The first was to observe it on the Sunday after the Jewish Passover. The second was to observe the feast at the Jewish Passover itself, during the night of 14 to 15 Nisan. Those who practiced the latter were known as *Quartodecimans*, from the significance of the fourteenth day of Nisan. It has long been assumed that the Sunday observance is original and the Quartodeciman practice was a second-century aberration that was nullified at the council of Nicaea. However, recent scholarship has revealed the situation to be more complex, arguing that the Quartodeciman practice is much older than previously thought and the celebration of Easter on Sunday later.

Following Thomas Talley, the extant witnesses show that the Christian Pasch is a gradual modulation of the Jewish Passover. The earliest witnesses to a yearly commemoration of the Pasch indicate that the celebration took place after midnight of 14 Nisan on whatever day of the week it fell. Midnight marked the end of the Jewish observance, after which or in opposition to the Christians kept a vigil until cockcrow, when they most likely celebrated the

209. Gerard A. M. Rouwhorst, *Les Hymnes Pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe*, Supplements to *Vigilae Christianae* 7,1 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), vol. 1. The Syriac text is in E. Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraems des Syrers Paschahymnen (De Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione)*, CSCO 248, Scriptores Syri 108 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1964). See also J. Gribomont, "La Tradition Liturgique des Hymnes Pascales de S. Éphrem," *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973): 191–246.

eucharist. Talley points out that the primary focus of the primitive Pasch was the death of the Lord rather than his resurrection. "Nevertheless, the content of the celebration went beyond the death itself to proclaim the total mystery of the Cross in all its dimensions, from incarnation to parousia."[210] As Paul Bradshaw observes, "Quartodecimanism is not some local aberration from a supposed normative practice dating from apostolic times, but is instead the oldest form of the Easter celebration."[211]

Quartodecimanism flourished in Asia Minor, and as Gerard Rouwhorst has shown in several studies pertinent to the Syriac-speaking churches, in Mesopotamia and Persia.[212] The pre-Nicene situation of the Church in these regions, Rouwhorst argues, was a Quartodeciman observance.[213] By the time of Aphrahat, the Christian Pasch had been moved

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210. Thomas J. Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2d ed. (New York: Pueblo, 1986), 13.

211. Paul F. Bradshaw, "The Origins of Easter," in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, ed. P. F. Bradshaw and L. Hoffman, Two Liturgical Traditions 5 (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1999), 82.

212. The juxtaposition of Christian observances as the Church grew and spread gave rise to the second-century paschal controversy between Victor, bishop of Rome, and Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus that resulted in Victor's excommunicating the province of Asia. See Talley, 18–27. For Rouwhorst, see "The Date of Easter in the Twelfth *Demonstration* of Aphraates," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982): 1374–1380; *Les Hymnes Paschales*, 1:128–203. Idem, "The Quartodeciman Paschal Observance and the Jewish Pesach," *Questions Liturgiques* 77 (1996): 152–173. See also "Das Manichaeische Bemafest und das Passafest der syrischen Christen," *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981): 397–411, where he argues that the Manichaen bema celebration that commemorated the death of Mani "manichaenized" Christian Quartodeciman Pasch just as Christian celebration had "christianized" Jewish Pesach.

213. As Rouwhorst admits, this is not a new discovery. It had been first laid out by B. Lohse, *Das Passafest der Quartodecimaner* (Gütersloh, 1953). Rouwhorst points out, however, that it was not generally accepted by other scholars. His article, "Quartodeciman Passover," takes into consideration more evidence than was available to Lohse and attempts to prove him correct. It should be noted that *pace* Talley, Rouwhorst does not hold that the Quartodeciman practice had an eschatological dimension.

from 14–15 Nisan to the fixed day of Friday after 14 Nisan. Aphrahat constructs a complex chronology based on the Gospels to align Christian observance with Friday, since it was on Friday that Christ suffered, died, and thus entered Sheol, corresponding to the motivating theme of the yearly observance as the celebration of the Christ's death.[214] Aphrahat directs his demonstration to those who are protesting a liturgical innovation, namely the move of the Christian Pasch from 14 Nisan to a Friday.[215] He has to argue for a three-day celebration (Friday-Saturday-Sunday) that is the beginning of a fusion of Quartodeciman practice and conformity to Nicaea in the Persian area. The fourth century in the region then is one of transition from a Quartodeciman observance.

The transition seems to have taken place earlier in the Syriac-speaking churches still in the Roman empire. Ephraem knows a three-day Paschal observance (Friday-Saturday-Sunday) that took the place of a previous Quartodeciman practice.[216] The dominant theological content of the Quartodeciman observance, with its emphasis on the death, descent, and ascent, is fused with a Sunday celebration whose accent falls on resurrection. Rouwhorst suggests that Ephraem's rich use of springtime images is an attempt to either account for the new emphasis or recover lost aspects of the celebration.[217]

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214. Rouwhorst, "Date," and *Hymnes Paschales*, 1:138–143.

215. Rouwhorst, "Date," 1375–1376.

216. This is the conclusion of Rouwhorst's study of the *Paschal Hymns* of Ephraem. See *Hymnes Paschales*, 1:195–203.

217. See *Hymnes Paschales*, 1:203. The vestiges of this fusion are still seen today in the liturgical books, where there are two 'paschs': "Pasch of the Crucifixion" (Friday-Saturday) and the "Pasch of the Resurrection" (Saturday-Sunday). Time is reckoned from the evening of the day before. Jean Galot observed that the meaning of the descent to Sheol is directly related to the transition from Jewish Passover to Christian Pasch. He links the deliverance of the people, Sabbath rest, and the new

These developments impact the content of the descent motif. First, while the Quartodeciman observance lasted one day and one night, the new celebration lasted three days and three nights. Aphrahat appeals to Matthew 12:40 that connects Jesus' three-day journey in the earth with Jonah's three-day voyage.[218] Thus, emphasis on those three days in the earth and an imaginative construal of those events would take on particular force. Second, the central motif of the Exodus in the Passover celebration (both Christian and Jewish), lends the images of the slaughter of the lamb, the destruction of pharaoh and his forces, the release of the enslaved Israelites from Egypt, and the going forth to dry land.

Ephraem clearly develops the symbolic weight of these events in light of the descent to Sheol, the destruction of Sheol, and the release of those held captive there. The descent to Sheol is presented as a key moment in the unfolding of the economy of salvation. The emplotment of the events, teased out from reference throughout the cycle, is consistent with Ephraem's other presentations of the motif: Christ is buried and descends to Sheol.[219] Death and Sheol devour him, not recognizing that Christ's divine life is hidden in his body. This divine life and its odor make them ill, and they vomit up Christ. Sheol bursts open, and all the dead go out with Christ.[220] The traces of this narrative run through the hymns. Notable

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Pasch established by Jesus' bodily resurrection. See Jean Galot, "La Descente du Christ aux Enfers," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 83 (1961): 491.

218. *Demonstration* 12:7.

219. In *Crucifixion* 8:11 and *Resurrection* 4:11,13 Sheol is identified as ܬܗܘܡܐ, "the deep," and ܬܗܘ̈ܡܐ, the "depths," in *Crucifixion* 5:17 and *Resurrection* 4:14.

220. See *Unleavened Bread*, 3:8, 11, 14; 4:2–14; 16:4–7; *Crucifixion* 3:17; 7:3; 8:14; *Resurrection* 3:11; 4:9–10; 5:4.

is the way the imagery of the wombs is deployed. In *Unleavened Bread* 16:4, it is used to capture the state of being closed up:

> For it was he that willed it, and the womb of Sheol contained him.
> And again, because he willed it, the womb of Mary contained him.[221]

In *Resurrection* 4:10, the two wombs are paralleled. Jesus enters one silently and the other powerfully:

> Again in this same Nisan, the Lord of Thunder
> In his mercy, moderated his fervor
> And he descended to dwell in the womb of Mary.
> Again in this same Nisan, he was mighty and
> Unsealed this womb of Sheol and ascended.[222]

Ephraem's desire to link the events of the Passover and the Pasch of Jesus leads him to compare and contrast the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt and the exodus of Christ and the just from Sheol:

> . . . In his slaughter he had shown his power / For, the dead one had saved the living.
> Thus the First-Born, the day of his slaughter, / Broke through Sheol, like Egypt.
> The dead left and proclaimed the power / Of the lamb who by his slaughter
> Made them exit from the womb of Sheol. / Glory to you who save your own![223]

He speaks of "Nisan in Sheol": The thunder of his voice makes the bones of the dead to rise just like the flowers grow and bloom (*Crucifixion* 8:3). Also, he contrasts the effects of the passover lamb and the "living" Lamb, Jesus (*Unleavened Bread* 3:8–11):

> With the Living Lamb there was a further Exodus, too,
> For the dead from Sheol, as from Egypt;
> For in Egypt two symbols are depicted,
> since it reflects both Sheol and Error.

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221. Syriac text in E. Beck, *Paschahymnen*, 28.

222. Syriac text in Beck, *Paschahymnen*, 91.

223. *Resurrection* 3:11; Syriac in Beck, *Paschahymnen*, 87.

With the Passover lamb, Egypt's greed
learnt to give back, against its wont;
With the Living Lamb, Sheol's hunger
disgorged back the dead, against its nature.[224]

In these paschal hymns, Ephraem connects the Biblical exodus narrative, the descent to Sheol narrative, and a natural narrative of death and rebirth. Reveling in antithesis and paradox, Ephraem combines and recombines imagery, not in the interest of chronicling the paschal events, but to mediate the meaning of the descent in the events of the Pasch (passion, death, descent, resurrection, mission of the Spirit).

Pseudo-Ephraemian Mêmrê for Holy Week

These pseudo-Ephraemian *mêmrê* treat the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. They are marked into liturgical subdivisions by a later redactor. The descent of Christ to Sheol is taken up in the sixth *mêmrâ* designated for the nocturns of lauds *(ṣaprâ)* for Friday of the crucifixion (Good Friday) and in the seventh, designated for the night vigil *(lelyâ)* for Saturday of the passion (Holy Saturday). According to Beck's study, the original core of sermons 2–6 was augmented by sermons 7–8, which explains why the descent theme occurs both in its more expected place, at the burial, and in the unusual place of Jesus' post-resurrection exhortation to his disciples. Beck places the editor/author in the vicinity and time of Jacob of Sarug (ca. 450–ca. 520).[225]

224. Translation from S. Brock, *Harp*, 38. Syriac text in Beck, *Paschahymnen*, 6–7.

225. *Ephraem Syrus Sermones in Hebdomadam Sanctam*, ed. E. Beck, CSCO 412, Scriptores Syri 181 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1979), 12*.

In the sixth *mêmrâ*, the descent to Sheol is paralleled with Jesus' burial in the tomb: "He was embalmed and buried / in order that he would descend to Sheol and despoil it."[226] The metrical homily underlines the fact that Jesus did this to fulfill the prophets and to reconcile heaven, earth, and Sheol (see ll. 1301–1302; ll. 1309–1312.) Sheol seems agreeable to the plan:

> Sheol was glad that he decended to it. / It was tremulous with pride when he entered it.
> He gave a sign to it, and it received him. / Three days he dwelt within it.[227]

A rather strained parallel is made between Sheol and Haran, and Jesus and Jacob in lines 1333 to 1344 (see Gn 28:10–33:17). Jacob entered Haran with a walking stick alone and Jesus entered Sheol with the Cross alone. Sheol is called the "true Haran." Just as Jacob left Haran with his children, thereby dispossessing it, so Jesus leaves Sheol with the dead. The *mêmrâ* continues by noting that Laban did not notice Jacob, nor did the guards *(nāṭôrê)* of Sheol recognize Jesus. Rachel "stole her father's idols *(ṣalmê)*" and "the quickening of the dead *(ḥayat mîtê)*, like Rachel, / has stolen the dead through Jesus' power."[228]

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226. Beck, 65, ll. 1297–1298.

227. Beck, 65, ll. 1317–1320.

228. The unusual use of Genesis 28–33 raises the question if there could be an underlying influence of a different lectionary system, especially given the way that the *mêmrâ* is divided according to liturgical celebration (Friday of the Passion, Great Saturday, etc.) Studies of the early Syriac lectionary system do show that there was a *lectio continua* of Genesis in the season of the Fast, but the readings for Genesis for Monday to Wednesday of "Holy Week" run from chapters 37 to 39; then the *lectio continua* ends. In fact the continuous reading appears to skip Genesis 28 to 33 (see Anton Baumstark, *Nichtevangelische syrische Perikopenordnungen der ersten Jahrtausends* [Munster: Aschendorff, 1921], 20; 42–46. See also Arthur J. Maclean, *East Syrian Daily Offices* [London: Rivington Percival and Co., 1894], 273). In the West Syrian tradition Genesis was read in course on the Sundays of the Fast, but not at the Pasch (see Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 109–110).

In the eighth *mêmrâ*, after his resurrection Jesus speaks about his descent to Sheol (ll. 458–532). The account begins:

> . . . Today I have conquered Death
> And I put Sheol to shame with it. / Today I humbled Hāmān
> To which I descended and from which I ascended. / I descended to Sheol alone,
> And no Watcher was with me. / Three days I dwelt in it.[229]

Again the *mêmrâ* insists that Jesus went alone into Sheol, as mentioned earlier. It even goes so far as to say no watcher (*ʿîrâ*) was there. Moreover, Sheol is called *hāmān*. Beck asserts he has not encountered this alternate name for the place of the dead, probably connected with the Hebrew *hâmôn*, in the authentic writings of Ephraem.[230] The point the *mêmrâ* then makes is that Jesus' three-day sojourn in Sheol is to fulfill the work of Jonah. Line 485 explains:

> The people of Israel refused me. / Now behold in me all that was written is fulfilled.
> Today I sealed the books / and alone descended to Sheol.[231]

Jesus seeks out Adam, for whom Jesus has humbled himself unto death to give him life. Jesus the merciful, heard Adam's voice, and went to Sheol to make Adam's redemption complete (see ll. 498–532).

Anonymous Sôgyātâ

Several anonymous dispute poems further witness to the popularity of the descent motif in the imagination of the time. Two main themes are treated and often merged.[232] The

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229. Beck, 77, ll. 458–464.

230. *Ephraem Syrus Sermones in Hebdomadam Sanctam*, trans. E. Beck, CSCO 413, Scriptores Syri 182 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1979), 134, n. 82. "Ein Name für Scheol (wahrscheinlich mit hebr. *hâmôn* zu verbinden), der mir in echten Schriften Ephräms nicht begegnet ist."

231. Sermo 7, ll. 485–488; Beck, CSCO 412, 77.

232. See Gerrit Jan Reinink, "Ein Syrisches Streitsgespräch zwischen Tod und Satan," in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues*, 141–142.

first theme is the formal dispute between Death and Satan concerning who has the greater power over human beings. The second takes up Satan's trying to persuade Death that it should let Jesus enter its realm. Death is very troubled because it fears that the events surrounding Jesus' death bode ill for them both.

An anonymous *sôgîtâ* transmitted in eastern manuscripts is a prime example.[233] It consists of forty-five stanzas in 7 + 7 syllable meter. It begins with the dispute between Satan and Death over who is greater. The characters draw on OT figures and events to bolster their respective positions. These figures include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Melchisedek, Joseph, Enoch, Moses, Elijah, Solomon, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (Stanzas 10–19). It then moves to take up Death's reluctance to let Christ into Sheol. The *sôgîtâ* concludes in doxology, giving a resumé of the central point:

> Glory to the Son, who by his resurrection / put Death and Satan to shame
> Wiped out voracious Sheol / and prevailed over the Jews.[234]

While the *sôgîtâ* between Satan and Death is embedded into the larger frame of the NH, it occurs here as alone, an independent piece. It allows us to see how the genre can function alone, even if the *sôgîtâ* in question is itself an intersection of two genres. The dispute has achieved a certain degree of stability in its own right. However, as the NH witness, the dispute can be provided a further encompassing narrative in order to draw out the theological

233. Syriac text in Reinink, 143–145. A series of anonymous poems transmitted in western manuscripts is presented by Sebastian Brock, ed., *Sôgyātâ mgabyātâ* (Losser, Netherlands: Monastery of Mar Ephraem the Syrian, 1982), 66–79. Following Brock's numeration, 15, 16, and 17 are versions of Ephraem's Nisibene Hymns 52, 53, and 54. Brock's number 14, a dispute between Satan and Death, appears in west Syrian liturgical manuscripts. Brock's notes and comments can be found in "Syriac Dialogue Poems," 48, 54. See also "Syriac Dispute Poems," 118–119.

234. Reinick, 145.

ܫܘܒܚܐ ܠܒܪܐ ܕܒܩܝܡܬܗ : ܐܒܗܬ ܠܡܘܬܐ ܘܣܛܢܐ
ܘܥܩܪܗ ܠܫܝܘܠ ܒܠܥܬܐ : ܘܙܟܗ ܠܝܗܘܕܝܘܬܐ

first theme is the formal dispute between Death and Satan concerning who has the greater power over human beings. The second takes up Satan's trying to persuade Death that it should let Jesus enter its realm. Death is very troubled because it fears that the events surrounding Jesus' death bode ill for them both.

An anonymous *sôgîtâ* transmitted in eastern manuscripts is a prime example.[233] It consists of forty-five stanzas in 7 + 7 syllable meter. It begins with the dispute between Satan and Death over who is greater. The characters draw on OT figures and events to bolster their respective positions. These figures include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Melchisedek, Joseph, Enoch, Moses, Elijah, Solomon, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (Stanzas 10–19). It then moves to take up Death's reluctance to let Christ into Sheol. The *sôgîtâ* concludes in doxology, giving a resumé of the central point:

> Glory to the Son, who by his resurrection / put Death and Satan to shame
> Wiped out voracious Sheol / and prevailed over the Jews.[234]

While the *sôgîtâ* between Satan and Death is embedded into the larger frame of the NH, it occurs here as alone, an independent piece. It allows us to see how the genre can function alone, even if the *sôgîtâ* in question is itself an intersection of two genres. The dispute has achieved a certain degree of stability in its own right. However, as the NH witness, the dispute can be provided a further encompassing narrative in order to draw out the theological

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implications. The main elements of the *sôgîtâ* preserve the traditional descent thematic: Christ, in his descent to Sheol has brought Death to naught. This is part of the unfolding of salvation history, and its shows that the powers of this world have no more sway. Yet this genre has also been exploited in an ideological fashion, where the descent motif leads to an invective against the Jewish people. The beginning of a more extensive invective, like that found in NH 67, is seen here.

Qûrilônâ

A contemporary of Ephraem's, Qûrilônâ witnesses to the integration of the descent motif into the standard Syriac expression of the paschal events. Nothing is known about the life and death of the poet Qûrilôna who flourished at the end of the fourth century.[235] The quality of his poetry earns him high respect with many Syriacists. In his "Homily on the Pasch of our Lord," he speaks about Christ's delivering himself to Sheol and not being devoured by death.[236] The poem establishes a pattern in which Jesus explains that "so and so is waiting for me to ascend and raise with me such and such." At the beginning of the lengthy section, he states:

> The Father is waiting for me
> to ascend and raise with me
> the body and the spirit, too,

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235. Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 67–68. The Syriac texts are edited by G. Bickel, "Die Gedichte des Cyrillonas," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 27 (1873): 566–598. This source was not available to me. All translations will be from the Italian of Costantino Vona, *I Carmi di Cirillona: Studio introduttivo-Traduzione-Commento*, Scrinium Patristicum Lateranense 2 (Paris/Tournai and Rome: Desclée and Editori Pontifici, 1963) by page and line.

236. Vona, p. 98, ll. 45–48.

that Death and the Evil One had lead into prison.[237]

The poem continues, and Adam is mentioned:

> The Throne is waiting for me / to ascend and sit upon it.
> And with me it will make Adam sit / the humble one who has been exalted.
> . . . .
> Paradise and the Garden / both are waiting for me,
> for I am bringing Adam in with me / and will make him reign in them.[238]

Toward the end of the *mêmrâ*, Qûrîlônâ describes the events at the death of Jesus on the cross. He describes Adam who runs from the grave, and Eve from Sheol.[239] This is a rare instance of the presence of Eve in the descent events. Qûrilônâ places emphasis on the restoration of Adam to Paradise as a key outcome of the descent.

Cave of Treasures

An anonymous work, the *Cave of Treasures* (CT) tells the story of Adam and Eve from a Christian reading of the Scriptures. The CT survives in both an East-Syrian and a West-Syrian recension and is generally assigned to the sixth century. However, scholars posit that Cave tradition itself has its origins to the fourth and even the third century.[240] The CT is a unique source that witnesses to the strong influence of Jewish traditions in Syriac

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237. Vona p. 99, ll. 55–58. "Il Padre mi aspetta / perché ascenda e sollevi con me / il corpo e pur l'anima / che la morte ed il maligno in prigiona condussero."

238. Vona, p. 99, ll. 67–70. "Il trono mi aspetta / perché ascenda e su di esso io segga / e con me Adamo faccia sedere / l'umile che è stato esalto. . . . Il Paradiso ed il Giardino / ambedue mi aspettano / perché Adamo introduca con me, / ed in essi regnare lo faccia."

239. See Vona, p. 111 ll .36–37.

240. *La Caverne des Trésors: Les deux recensions syriaques*, ed. Su-Min Ri, CSCO 487, Scriptores Syri 208 (Louvain: Peeters, 1987), xxii–xxiii; and Marius de Jonge and Johannes Tromp, *The Life of Adam and Eve and Related Literature* (Sheffield: Acadamic Press, 1997), 85. See also M. E. Stone, A *History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), 90–95.

Christianity. It displays a special interest in OT genealogies and chronologies and is marked by a strong Adam-Christ typology. Van Rompay discerns a clear interrelationship between the *Cave* and Ephraem's works.[241]

The cave of treasures, *mʿarāt gazê*, is on a mountain near Paradise, and Adam and Eve retire here after their expulsion. Adam brought gold, incense, and myrrh with him from Paradise and put them in the cave, which the Magi subsequently found and brought to Christ at his birth. Adam is buried here, and, after the flood, Shem takes his body to Golgotha, which was considered the center of the earth.[242]

The last chapter of the *Cave* explains the descent of Christ into Sheol. It weaves together many images and themes in its account of the reason for the descent, its effects, and Christ's activity, with some provocative additions. Since Shem had moved Adam's body to Golgotha, according to the *Cave*, Jesus is crucified on the grave of Adam. Therefore, when the blood and water flow from Jesus's side when the soldiers pierce it, the issue of blood gives life to Adam and the water is like his baptism.[243] It summarizes the results of the descent as follows:

> The descent of Christ to Sheol was the cause of many benefits for our race. On account of our salvation, because he deposed death from its power, he preached the resurrection to those that lie in the dust, and to those who sinned without the law he granted forgiveness.

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241. See van Rompay, 630, and Gary Anderson, "The Cosmic Mountain: Eden and Its Early Interpreters in Syriac Christianity," in *Genesis 1–3 in the History of Exegesis: Intrigue in the Garden*, ed. Gregory Allen Robbins, Studies in Women and Religion 27 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Press, 1988), 187–224.

242. See van Rompay, 629–630 and de Jonge, 85–86.

243. Syriac text in Su-Min Ri, ed. *La Caverne des Trésors: Les deux recensions syriaques*, CSCO 486, Scriptores Syri 207 (Louvain: Peeters, 1987), 430/432 (eastern rescension) and 431/433 (western recension).

> He laid waste Sheol, killed sin, put Satan to shame, made the demons mourn, and he brought to an end the festivals of the evil spirits. When he rose from the grave, he abrogated both sacrifices and altars, and he made a restitution to Adam. When he rose from the grave on the third day, he appeared before the great assembly of the disciples and afterward to all the apostles.[244]

The account continues with the description of Peter's bringing bread and wine to the guards at the tomb, in the hope that the drunk guards would pass out, allowing Peter to retrieve Jesus' body. Before Peter could carry out his plan, Jesus rose and appeared to him. While marked by the now familiar stock images of the descent, the *Cave* places a particular emphasis on the restitution of Adam, which it shows includes his baptism by Jesus.

The Golden Period: Assessment

The theme of Christ's descent to Sheol takes on a power and prolixity in the Syriac literary tradition of the golden period. The descent becomes a crucial element in the Syriac theological vision as it unfolds the economy of salvation.

The early period's sporadic mention of the descent to Sheol indicates that already the Syriac world considered the descent a significant event in the redemptive activity of Jesus. Taking their cue from the kerygmatic dimension of the motif in the NT, the early texts, which take up a variety of genres like prayer and hymn, begin to fill out the ambiguities of the bare narrrative: Christ descended to Sheol and rose thence three days later. In the golden period, the descent comes to be expressed with more complex genres: the *taḥwîtâ*, the *mêmrâ*, the *madrāshâ*, and the *sôgîtâ*. Further, it is drawn into commentaries, and as the CT show,

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244. The East-Syrian recension; Syriac text in Ri, 454–456. The West-Syrian text omits the phrase "when he had risen from the tomb" so that the suppression of the altars and sacrifices and the resoration of Adam take place in Sheol. Also, he appears first to Peter and to John, not to a great gathering in this recension.

prose narrative. Under the conventions of these expressive genres, the descent theme is embedded as part of the unfolding of paschal events or becomes a central symbol for theological explanation, as in the case of the *Homily on the Lord* or the NH. The original bare narrative, with its indeterminacies and temporal gaps, is emplotted by assimilating seemingly endless fragments of Scripture (Jacob to Jonah, Exodus, Isaiah's prophecies, snippets of psalms, etc.) and or natural imagery (gestation, digestion, medicine, seasons). As these connections are made, semantic relations are established between paschal event, scriptural text, and the *humanum*. Yet, there is also a reverse moment, in which not only is the Scripture and nature used to interpret the event, but the event is used to interpret the Scripture, nature, and world of human living. This proliferation of images enriches the motif and, particularly in odd juxtapositions, expands its semantic range.

Under the "innovative force of poetic composition,"[245] certain schemes or sequences of details begin to coalesce into a figurative system. The compositions seek out the potential in biblical story, mythic systems, and imaginative discourse and integrates images, contrasts and comparisons, and narratives. For example, the postmortem events of Jesus can be traced from the cry on the cross that makes Death shudder, to the manifestation of life in the midst of death, illumination of the dead, the bursting of Sheol's womb, and the restitution of Adam in Paradise. Rarely is the entire repertoire called upon—the exception being the NH. What is selected and deleted depends on the context of the realization of a particular genre. To underline the oral quality of the poetic texts, that is to say, that they are intended for or

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245. The expression is from Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1:54.

derived from public performance, what is selected and deleted is occasioned by what would make the argument or strategy of persuasion compelling for a particular local setting.

At this juncture in the exploration of the tradition emerges a crucial question: Why are they interpreting in this way? The expansion of the descent motif reflects two interrelated developments. First is a more amplified and refined theological vision. In this period, the theological vision has taken on more depth and scope. In an effort to preach and teach the Christian faith to the assemblies of believers, the writers appeal to the entire unfolding of the economy of salvation that is mediated in mystical symbols in the Old and New Testaments and in the natural world. This vision is given classic expression in the *Homily on the Lord.* Here, the descent to Sheol is the central moment in salvation history. Through the descent to Sheol the tradition links together creation, fall, incarnation, resurrection, and final glory. It explains that Jesus put on a body, the human body, in order to be able to enter into Sheol. It is only in a body that he could go unto the realm of the dead so that he could liberate the dead and initiate the final resurrection, by leaving a leaven of life in its midst. Gradually the salvation of all humankind is expressed by synecdoche. Jesus puts on the body of Adam to be able to go to Sheol to retrieve Adam and restore him to paradise. The Syriac Fathers sought to draw out the doctrinal implications of the salvation of the first human being in the redeeming act of Jesus. Likewise, the theological significance of the final resurrection to the faith of the 'great Church' occasioned further precision of the eschatological dimension of the descent to Sheol. The preachers and teachers had to explain why people still died, but how this death was no longer the end because of Jesus' Pasch.

The second development relates to the Syriac penchant for theological expression by means of symbol and poetry. The growth and development of the liturgical celebration occasions the composition of more liturgical poetry. Ephraem serves as the representative witness. A few observations about Ephraem's use of figurative language and close biblical reading are in order, though a detailed explication of Ephraem's hermeneutics is beyond the scope of this examination. Many scholars have endeavored to detail Ephraem's method. In one instance, Ephraem is even considered as anticipating the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur by sixteen centuries.[246] However, these lines of thinking often fail to take the textuality of of Ephraem's hymns and homilies themselves into consideration. These texts are powerful instances of inscribing a biblical imagination, in all its indeterminacy, allusiveness, and metaphor. A more productive way to consider Ephraem's biblical imagination is to consider it under the rubric of *Christian midrash*. In his study of the hermeneutical operation of midrash, Daniel Boyarin's descriptions of the rabbis could well be predicated of Ephraem:

> One of the important dynamics of midrash as reading is that it makes manifest the hidden dimensions of that mythic intertext by gathering together the fragments of allusions and figural language and reinscribing them into narratives.[247]

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246. I have in mind here Robert Murray, who suggested this some years ago in "The Theory of Symbolism in St Ephrem's Theology," *Parole de l'Orient* 6–7 (1975–76): 3. Even if Murray has in mind only the early Ricoeur, I question whether his thesis would stand up to closer scrutiny. Others have outlined laws for Ephraem's exegesis. See Bertrand de Margerie, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse*, vol. 1, *Les Pères grecs et orientaux* (Paris: Cerf, 1980), 165–187. I concur with Griffith, who observes, "Given the suggestive intricacy of his rich imagination, it seems some how rash to lay down laws for Ephraem's biblical exegesis" (In *'Faith Adoring'*, 32). In this monograph, Griffith offers a careful qualification of what "doing theology" means for Ephraem.

247. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994), 94. Not all midrash scholars find appeal to contemporary literary theory useful. See David Stern, "Literary Criticism or Literary Homilies," *Prooftexts* 5 (1985): 96–97; and "Moses-cide: Midrash and Contemprary Literary Criticism," *Prooftexts* 4 (1984): 197.

He further observes:

> Rabbis [were] assiduous readers of the Bible . . . their own hermeneutic work consisted of a creative process of further combining and recombining biblical verse into new texts, exposing the interpretative relations already in the text, as it were, as well as creating new ones by revealing linguistic connections hitherto unrealized.[248]

In short, Ephraem continued the trajectories of meaning set out in the Biblical text, expanding the explicit and exploding the implicit. As the creeds provided an example of the mediation of tradition by a genre, so does Ephraem's *oeuvre,* through which the Christian faith is mediated by poesis rather than the propositional language or dogmatic formulations that resist the indeterminacy of figurative language. Therefore, under the operations of this biblical imagination, with its extensions and recombinations, the descent of Christ to Sheol takes on an amplitude and allusiveness in order to mediate the great economy of God's salvation to the Church gathered.

THE FIFTH-SIXTH CENTURY WRITERS

The fifth and sixth centuries mark a major turning point in the Syriac tradition with the emergence of distinctly eastern and western theological and literary traditions. I will follow the eastern tradition. The major figures examined in this section are Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–d. 428), Narsai (d. 503), Cyrus of Edessa (fl. sixth century), and Jacob of Sarug (d. ca. 520). The descent to Sheol continues to appear and fascinate the authors, but distinct shifts take place under the changing theological scene. This section will first set out the christological developments with particular attention to Theodore of Mopsuestia and

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248. Boyarin, 128.

Nestorius, who are formative for the East Syrian Church's theology. Then it will take up the descent theme as it appears in significant passages of the most influential writers of the period, Narsai, Cyrus of Edessa, and Jacob of Sarug.

Christological Context

A brief resumé of changing currents in fifth- and sixth-century christology will set the theological context of the day. These new questions and the search for precision to answer them effect the understanding and explanation of the descent of Christ to Sheol. First, the question arises among theologians whether Jesus—body and soul, humanity and divinity—descended to Sheol. Second, the motif of the descent plays a role in the christological questions about the relationship of Jesus' human and divine natures. Third, the language of the doctrinal arguments effects the figurative language.

The roots of the controversies can be traced to the tradition of Antiochene theology, with its classically described *logos-anthropos* christology. Of major importance for the Syrian churches is Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428), who had a primary formative influence on East Syrian theology. Theodore's christology emphasized the clear distinction between the human and divine natures in Jesus. He seeks to preserve at once the transcendence of God and the integrity of Jesus' humanity.[249] According to Theodore, the divine Logos dwells in the man Jesus. However, this indwelling is not like the dwelling of the Word of God in a prophet,

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249. See Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*, trans. Matthias Westerhoff and ed. Andrew Louth (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 201–203; Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. J. S. Bowden (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 338–360; and Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 243–256.

but is a unique union only "as in a Son." Theodore strives to explain that the Logos assumed the man Jesus in such a way that he united himself to him in an exact conjunction. He employs the term *prosōpon* (in Syriac, *parṣopâ*) in a particular fashion. For Theodore, *prosōpon* "is thus the ultimate expression of the close conjunction which exists between Christ's humanity and the hypostasis of the Logos."[250] At the heart of the matter was the suffering, death, and descent of Jesus Christ: Did only the humanity of Jesus suffer and descend? Could the divinity suffer? Theodore explains that the divinity was not separated from the humanity in his crucifixion, nor did the divinity leave the humanity at death, but remained with him until the divinity helped him to loose the cords of death.[251] For Theodore human salvation is realized through communion with the *homo assumptus* who is now incorruptible. Much of the motivation for Theodore's arguments came from his need to affirm the reality of Jesus' suffering against the docetists and to safeguard his divinity against the patripassionists.

Theodore's student Nestorius, for whom the East Syrian Church would come to have a particular affinity, was named the patriarch of Constantinople in 428 until he was deposed in 431 amid doctrinal and political imbroglio. Nestorius stressed the clear distinction of the divine and human natures of Christ without wishing to deny the unity.[252] His christology is

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250. Grillmeier, 353.

251. *Catechetical Homilies* 5:6 in *Les Homélies Catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste*, ed. Raymond Tonneau and Robert Devreesse, Studi e Testi 145 (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1949), 107.

252. Grillmeier, 369–388; Pelikan 1:251–256. See also André de Halleux, "Nestorius, histoire et doctrine," *Irénikon* 56 (1993): 38–51; 163–77.

a "sharpening of the Antiochene approach."[253] What must be kept in mind is that Nestorius did not consider the humanity and divinity to be two abstract natures, but rather an individual, concrete human nature and the Godhead that subsists in the Logos.[254] He rejects the notion of the *communicatio idiomatum*, which would allow one to predicate suffering of the divinity and employ the title "Mother of God" *(Theotokos)* of Mary. For Nestorius, "Christ is thus 'the common name of the two natures,'" the sum of the two natures.[255] Yet, Nestorius is concerned to maintain the unity of these natures in Christ, even though he is not completely clear and theologically convincing.[256] He draws on the term used by Theodore, *prosōpon*, which for him entails an external undivided appearance. Each nature has its *prosōpon*, "its own characteristics, its own appearance, through which it is characterized in its individuality."[257] It is the collective term "for all that pertains to the characterisitics of a naure, inwardly and outwardly."[258] In the unity of the *prosōpon* of Christ, one can perceive his unconfused human and divine natures. Nestorious denied preaching two Christs, affirming a "conjunction" *(synapheia)*, despite the attacks of his adversaries.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) addressed the controversies over the question of the relationship between the divine nature *(physis)* and human nature *(physis)* of Christ.

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253. Grillmeier, 381.

254. Grillmeier, 381.

255. Grillmeier, 377.

256. Grillmeier sympathized with Nestorius: "The distinction of the natures is the easier part. . . . It is harder to explain the unity." See 380–381.

257. Grillmeier, 383.

258. Grillmeier, 385.

According to the council, two natures *(duo physeis)* that were without confusion *(asygchytōs)*, without change *(atreptōs)*, without division *(adiairetōs)*, and without separation *(achōristōs)* each concur in one person *(hen prosōpon)* and one *hypostasis*.[259] A central problem arose with the reception and translation of this Greek conciliar terminology into Syriac. The situation was made worse by the inflamed political and divided ecclesiastical context.

In the Greek terminology, "hypostasis and person were practically synonomous in orthodox usage."[260] Syriac, however, distinguished between hypostasis *(qnomâ)* and person *(parṣopâ)*. *Qnomâ* is "its own unique being, and is one in number. . . . It is distingiushed from other fellow hypostases through the special property that it possesses in its person."[261] *Parṣopâ* is a quality of *qnomâ*. Furthermore, the relationship between *qnomâ* and nature *(kyanâ/ physis)* comes into play. As Sebastian Brock explains:

> In East Syrian understanding *kyana* ('nature', φύσις) is generic, while *qnoma* is an individual manifestation of a *kyana*; thus the two *kyane* in Christ are often specifically described as being 'the divinity and the humanity', and correspondingly the *qnoma* of the divinity is God the Word, perfect God, and the *qnoma* of the humanity is the Man Jesus, perfect Man: and here it needs emphasizing that "the Man" [which in East Syrian terminology means "an individual human being" in the abstract] is definitely never thought of as having any separate pre-existence, prior to the Union. Furthermore . . . there is never any doubt that God the Word in his humanity suffered and died; there is no question of two subjects.[262]

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259. The Ὅρος πίστεως of the Council of Chalcedon, in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. Instituto per le scienze religiose Bologna (Bologna: Instituto per le scienze religiose, 1973), 86.

260. J. Pelikan, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2., *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 44.

261. Pelikan, 2:45.

262. Sebastian Brock, "The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials," in *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, Collected Studies Series 357 (Brookfield, Vt., and Ashgate: Variorum, 1992), 131.

Thus, in the human flesh the Logos suffered, was crucified, and died in the flesh, but as God was the firstborn of the dead, life and life-giver itself. These terminological precisions and christological clarifications surface in the writings of the period that employ the descent motif.[263]

Narsai (d. 503)

Narsai, a devoted student of Theodore of Mopsuestia and his teaching, taught and later headed the School of Edessa known for its christological stance that emphasized the two natures in Christ.[264] Narsai fled Edessa later in his career at the school when the monophysites came to power. He moved to Nisibis and founded the School of Nisibis, the central place of theological thinking and training for scholars of the East Syrian churches.[265]

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263. Some precision of the theological spectrum is useful at this point. The East Syrian Church, at one end, is sharply *diophysite*, that is, makes a strict distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ. The West and Byzantine East make a real but lesser distinction between the two natures. The West Syrian Church (Syrian Orthodox), however, sees only one nature 'composed' out of two. They do not, as Sebastian Brock emphasizes, hold that this one nature is only the divine that swallowed up the human. This is the radical *monophysite* position (espoused, for example, by Eutyches). Brock suggests naming the Syrian Orthodox position *henophysite* to avoid attributing radical monophysitism to it. See his "An Introduction to Syriac Studies," in *Horizons in Semitic Studies*, ed. J. H. Eaton (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Department of Theology, 1980), 31. See also idem, "Christology," 130.

264. According to (Pseudo-)Barḥadbshaba, author of the sixth-century *Cause for the Founding of the Schools*, the "exegetical tradition of the school of Edessa [consists] of three elements: (1) that which follows the traditions [*mashlmānûtâ*] of Mar Ephraem, that is that which they say was transmitted from the time of Addai the Apostle, (2) the commentary [*pushāqâ*] of Theodore of Mopseustia and (3) the tradition [*mashlmānûtâ*] of the school, that is, explications originally transmitted orally and inserted into the homilies and other works of Mar Narsai." The original text is found in A. Scher, *Mar Barḥadbshabba ʿArbaya. Cause de la fondation des écoles*, Patrologia Orientalis 4, no. 4 (Paris 1908), 382–383. This translation is from J. Frishman, "Type and Reality in the Exegetical Homilies of Mar Narsai," *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989):169.

265. Frederick G. McLeod, *Narsai's Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension*, Patrologia Orientalis 40, no. 182 (Turhout: Brepols, 1979), 7–8. See also A. Vööbus, *The School of Nisibis*, CSCO 266, subsidia 26 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1965), 80–81.

A constitutive part of the school's curriculum was commentary on the liturgy, the liturgical year, and martyrologia.[266] While Narsai fell under attack and was accused by his adversaries of being Nestorian, recent scholarship has demonstrated that while a strict diophysite, he is "basically orthodox and adequately maintains the personal unity of the natures in Christ."[267] Narsai is of central significance for the East Syrian tradition because his teachings were absorbed by the Schools of Edessa and Nisibis. Moreover, his homilies "form a unique reflection and synthesis of Theodore's basic concepts in a genre closer to Ephrem than any greco-roman rhetorical style."[268]

The East Syrian Church heralds Narsai as the 'Harp of the Spirit'; he was a prolific writer, although only a portion of his opus has survived.[269] Narsai treats the theme of the descent to Sheol *in extenso* in his homilies on the resurrection (composed ca. 450) and briefly in the homily on the passion (composed ca. 450) and for Epiphany *(denḥâ)* (composed ca. 471). "To delineate what characterizes his style is exceedingly difficult."[270] Narsai uses both

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266. Vööbus, 104; cf. 78.

267. Conclusions from a dissertation cited by McLeod by Ibrahim Ibrahim, "La Doctrine christologique de Narsaï," (S. Tomasso Aquino in Urbe, 1974–75), 7, n. 3. See also McCleod's résumé of Narsai's christology, 22–29.

268. J. Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy: An Edition, Translation and Study of Six Biblical Homilies by Narsai* (Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, 1992), 186.

269. See McLeod, 8–10, 29. Three hundred *mêmrê* are ascribed to him of which only around eighty to eighty-five surviving *mêmrê*, perhaps a *sôgîtâ* and a few *madrāshê* can be attributed to him. See McLeod's discussion, 8–17, for relevant bibliography and manuscript considerations.

270. McLeod, 29.

seven-syllable and twelve-syllable meter.[271] His homilies are marked by intricate balance of words, phrases, and clauses that he often interrupts for effect. His homilies are further marked by a very structured format whose fundamental unit is the distich, which is used in varying combination for parallel and contrast.[272] The homilies for the liturgical feasts under consideration here alternate passages between biblical exposition and interpretation and refutation of his adversaries, in this case in particular, the radical monophysites.[273]

In Narsai's *mêmrâ* on the Passion, he interprets the postmortem activities of Jesus. The whole passage is colored by concern for christological precision to avoid any hint that the divine nature suffered. Narsai explains that the body was placed in a grave, but Death did not corrupt his body:

> For three days the quickener of the dead remained within the grave;
> And he brought a charge against death and rendered null and void his authority.
> The Word who had put on him was with him as he was laying in the grave;
> But He was not suffering by means of his sufferings because exalted is His nature *(kyānēh)* above suffering.
> The Word was setting angels in attendance over his holy body;
> And spiritual ones were awaiting his sign that quickens all.
> The Only-Begotten Word of the Father fullfilled his promise to him;
> And after death had loosened his body he raised him on the third day.
> . . . .
>
> .

271. The seven-syllable meter is known as "the meter of Saint Ephraem" and the twelve-syllable meter is dubbed "the meter of Narsai." However, in the West Syrian Church, twelve-syllable meter is attributed to Jacob of Sarug. McLeod suggests on the basis of his dating of the homilies of Narsai that Narsai was using twelve-syllable meter before Jacob of Sarug was born. See McLeod, 33, n. 128.

272. See McLeod, 30. See the detailed study by T. Jansma, "Etude sur la pensée de Narsai," *L'Orient Syrien* 11 (1966): 147–168, 265–290, 393–429.

273. See McLeod, 24, 31–32.

> The member of our race was making battle with death and the slanderer,
> And he conquered the two tyrants who had exalted themselves
> By the power of the One who put him on.[274]

Further Narsai affirms that it is the power of the divine nature that descended with the body to engage in the struggle and make it victorious. He asserts the divinity was "with him when he was suffering" (*ʿmeh hwâ kad ḥāʾesh hwâ)* but he did not share in the humiliation. He elaborates:

> The exterior temple of his body death destroyed with the help of the insolent,
> but the Word who dwells in him built an edifice that will never again be shaken.
> . . . .
> Destruction belongs to the mortal body and this alone tasted death.
> By the destruction of the body he taught that he was a passible man.
> and when he rose after three days he showed the power who raised him up.[275]

In the *mêmrâ* on the resurrection, Narsai develops the descent to Sheol, the battle with death, and the raising up of Adam as the central mystery of the Pasch. Jesus' struggle with Satan (the Evil One) in the desert prepared him for the battle with insatiable Death (ll. 23–26). Taking up the imagery of a legal charge, the homily shifts from third person to first as Satan explains that Adam and Eve signed a bond in Eden when they succumbed to sin. This bond of mortality is over all human flesh because Adam did not repay it (ll. 46–54). Jesus replies to the Evil One, in the course of which he explains that the power that clothed him in the womb and the purpose for it is hidden from the Evil One. Jesus explains he will cancel the bond of the Evil One's lordship over mortals (l. 108). Jesus explains, "Behold! I will descend to the depth of Sheol as into the sea / and swiftly proclaim the name of my victory" (ll. 123–124). What Jonah depicted by mystical symbols *(bʾrāzê)*, Jesus will

274. Passion, ll. 659–611. McLeod, 126–127. I have basically followed McLeod's translation.

275. Passion, ll. 641–653. McLeod, 128–129.

accomplish in reality *(bsûʿrānâ)*. Thus Jesus declares, "Therefore let the gates of Sheol raise their head before me, / so that I may enter and lead the captivity of Adam away from the Strong One" (ll. 129–130).[276] With his own blood he will write out redemption and tear up the bond over all the prisioners in Sheol.

The *mêmrâ* returns to interpretive material, explaining the descent to Sheol:

> The quickener of all descended and plunged *(ʿmad)* in Sheol, dead sea,
> And conferred a power of vitality to the dead waters.
> With a gentle breeze he stirred those who were senseless,
> And thousands of the dead began to proceed to the rendezvous of life.[277]

In an intriguing passage, Narsai explains that these dead came forth to proclaim to both the living and the dead the hope of the resurrection. But the living rejected the message of the dead. The dead then announced redemption to the rest of dead. However, it seems that the ministry of the dead to the living continued, because the metrical homily explains that the dead would appear to the living. These dead were not the dead of ancient day who were raised, but those recently dead who were kin of the generation of the living. Thus, the living generation would recognize that someone they knew who was dead is now alive and be even more convinced of the witness (ll. 149–166).

Praise of the risen Jesus, the Second Adam who gave life to the First Adam and his offspring, follows. Then, the homily explains that the watchers and spiritual ones showed the earthly realm the wonder of the resurrection. This is why the watchers removed the stone, so that the eye-witnesses could behold the empty grave (ll. 185–216). After further

276. The echo of Psalm 23:7 is clear.

277. Passion, ll. 139–142. McLeod translates ܥܡܕ as "bathed." I have used "plunged" to capture the descent imagery. The same word also means "to be baptized."

explanation of the mystical symbols of Jonah, the folded garments, and the testimony of nature, Jesus gives a victory speech that picks up the legal imagery set out in the beginning. He announces that he has nullified the bond of mortality and crushed death. While a mortal one fell, the King dwelling in him has renewed him.

Narsai interjects to refute the monophysite position. Accordingly, he argues, Jesus' human nature *(kyānâ)* fell in Sheol under death; he died according to human nature. But it was the indwelling divine nature that refashioned and raised up the body, retrieved Adam, and cried out in Sheol, "smashed its gates and broke its bars, plundered it and went forth" (ll. 365–366). The concluding exhortation speaks of the "sacrifice of our body" *(debḥâ dpagran)* that has reconciled the Creator with creatures. It seems that by and through a human body, which was put to death, divinity was enabled to renew the universe (ll. 383–388).

In the homily on the Epiphany, Narsai links Jesus' baptism in the Jordan with paschal imagery by means of a descent-ascent motif. He juxtaposes womb and tomb imagery, descent to Sheol, and the retrieval of Adam. Jesus descended "into the womb of water as in a grave / and he rose and was raised and brought Adam up mystically (ll. 295–296).[278] Narsai explains the significance of Jesus' baptism and the efficacy of sacramental baptism through appeal to the divine plan of salvation.[279] The human race was exiled and humilated. The fetters of death were laid upon it, and it was imprisoned in Sheol (ll. 379–381). However,

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278. Syriac text in McLeod, 88.

279. For Narsai's homily on baptism, which comments on the liturgical *ordo*, see R. Connolly, *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, Texts and Studies 8 (Cambridge, 1908). He does not make use of Sheol imagery in this homily.

divine mercy took pity and redeemed it. Jesus "depicted *(ṣar)* by his baptism the death, life, and renewal of all" (ll. 408).

It is significant to note that Narsai's Epiphany homily creates a metaphoric extension of the descent motif, juxtaposing the descent to Sheol with the descent of Jesus into the Jordan. While briefly alluded to in Ephraem, this explicit connection of the watery abyss of Sheol and the Jordan allows a mutal interaction between the paschal and eschatological themes with the baptismal themes of the Jordan. It opens up a long series of extensions and recodings of the motif. Also, it enables the poets to connect ecclesial sacramental practice with salvation history. Narsai's contemporary, Jacob of Sarug, is also representative of this line of interpretation.

Jacob of Sarug (ca. 450–ca. 520)

While Jacob of Sarug is more readily associated with the West Syrian Church and its liturgical texts, he is a central, classic figure of the whole Syriac literary tradition. As such he expresses the received tradition and its distinctive thought. However, Jacob of Sarug's poetic artistry and dynamic understanding of biblical interpretation bring further development to the tradition. Consideration is given to him here to show parallels to Narsai and to explore the amplitude that the Sheol motif had attained at the apex of the literary tradition.[280] His prose homilies for liturgical feasts and several of his *mêmrê*, especially those for the Pasch, are particularly rich sources for his development of the motif.

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280. For a concise overview of Jacob's life and work, including attention to the doctrinal controversies of the day, see *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. H. R. Balz et al., (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1987), s.v. "Jakob von Sarug," by Wolfgang Hage.

Ordained chorbishop of Batnan in Sarug two years before his death, Jacob is remembered as a master commentator on Scripture and the author of some 763 metrical homilies and many other prose and poetic works.[281] Jacob is noted in the West for his use of the twelve-syllable meter that "allowed for an amplitude" that he needed to express his thoughts. A large number of copiests and scribes were put at his disposal, and his *mêmrê* were used in the cells of the solitaries, ascetics, mourners, and monks.[282] Jacob had attended the famous Edessa school around 470, at about twenty years of age, when it was one of the centers of christological controversy at the time.[283] However, Jacob distanced himself from the controversies, especially in his metrical works.[284] While he came to reject a strict

281. See the comments of B. Boulos-Sony, "La Méthode exégétique de Jacques de Saroug," *Parole de l'Orient* 9 (1979–1980): 67. Boulos-Sony cites Paris Syr. 177, col. 147a–148b, an anonymous manuscript whose title is ܥܠ ܡܪܝ ܝܥܩܘܒ ܡܠܦܢܐ ܪܒܐ
ܕܟܠܢ ܕܗܘܝܘ ܟܠܝܠܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ ܘܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܕܟܠܗ ܬܠܡܝܕܘܬܐ. MS Paris Syr. 177 is the longer of two anonymous panegyric homilies important for their depiction of the life of Jacob. For details on the MS, see A. Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Mēmrē-Dichtung des Ja'qōb von Serūg*, vol. 1, *Sammlungen: Die Handschriften*, CSCO 344 subsidia 39 (Louvain: Imprimérie Orientaliste, 1973), 13–16. For a more recent edition of the text with German translation, see Paul Krüger, "Ein zweiter anonymer memra über Jakob von Serugh," *Oriens Christianus* 56 (1972): 112–134.

282. See Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, 3:119–122. For an analysis of the rhetorical structure of Jacob's *mêmrê*, see Jost G. Blum, "Zum Bau von Abschnitten in Memre von Jacob von Sarug," *III Symposium Syriacum 1980*, ed. René Lavenant, OCA 221 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1985), 307–321. For consideration particularly of the prose homilies, see F. Rilliet, "Rhétorique et Style à l'époque de Jacques de Saroug," in *Symposium Syriacum IV 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers et al., OCA 229 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Insitute, 1987), 289–295.

283. See Hage, "Jakob von Sarug."

284. Indeed, according to Vööbus, Jacob was "calm" and dignified in the christological strife of the day, which irked his contemporaries like Philoxenous of Mabug. See *History of Asceticism*, 3:121.

diophysite christology, some scholars question whether he turned monophysite. This seems a too hasty judgment of Jacob's theological orientation.[285]

Prose Homilies for Liturgical Feasts

In a prose homily for the Nativity, Jacob explains that human beings were ejected from Eden and received by Sheol where their mantles of light were exchanged for its cobwebs and desperation.[286] In the homily for the Friday of the Passion, Jacob explains that the divine image was not left in Sheol (Homily 5:6). In the homily for the Sunday of the Resurrection, the descent to Sheol appears in passing. In the first mention, it is linked with baptism: "Death descended and life ascended. Sheol was shut in and baptism was opened."[287] In a second mention, Jacob refers to 1 Corinthians 15:55 and explains that by Jesus' crufixion he entered Sheol to pillage it and cast the crown of death to the ground. Jesus trampled the gates of Sheol, triumphant like those who trampled the gate of Samaria (2 Kgs 7:20). Death cried out in Sheol, and its sting was broken (Homily 6:7).

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285. For Jacob's christology as monophysite, see Roberta C. Chestnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). For a rehabilitation of Jacob as "orthodox," see T. Jansma, "The Credo of Jacob of Serugh. A Return to Nicea and Constantinople," *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiednis* 44 (1960): 18–36; "Die Christologie Jakobs von Serugh und ihre Abhängigkeit von der alexandrinischen Theologie und der Frömmigkeit Ephraems des Syrers," *Le Muséon* 78 (1965): 5–46; "Encore le Credo de Jacques de Saroug: Nouvelles recherches sur l'argument historique concernant son orthodoxie," *L'Orient Syrien* 10 (1965): 75–88, 193–236, 331–370, 475–510. See also T. Bou Monsour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug* (Kaslik, Lebanon: Holy Spirit University, 1993).

286. Syriac text in Frédéric Rilliet, *Jacques de Saroug: Six Homélies Festales en Prose*, Patrologia Orientalis 43 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986), p. 540, ll. 16–19.

287. Homily 6:3; Syriac in Rilliet, p. 630, ll. 21–22.

In another prose homily on the passion of the Lord, Jacob switches from expository third person to embed a first-person narrative where Jesus explains his actions.[288] Jacob sets out the scene, recalling that Adam, the head of the human race, is in the cavern of the dead *(hawtâ dmîtê)* with all his descendants. There he is serving out the debt *(ḥawbtâ)* he incurred through his sin. Christ explains that he will settle the bond *(ʾeshṭārâ)* and pay the debt: "I will not leave our image to travail in Sheol."[289] This sets into motion the plot, which focuses on the events of the passion and crucifixion, with passing mention of the incarnation. The point of Jesus' suffering and death is to be able to seek out Adam.[290]

Metrical Homilies *(mêmrê)*

In several places in Jacob's *oeuvre* the descent to Sheol and Jesus' baptism in the Jordan are juxtaposed.[291] Jacob elaborates on Jesus' sojourn in the place of the dead, explaining that he gave them light, gladdened them, and healed their wounds:

> He cast himself down to the sea of the dead like swimmers;
> He descended and brought up the priceless pearl.
> The image of his father that within the depths had fallen and was lost;
> He sought and lifted up from perdition that which had worn out in it.[292]

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288. Syriac text in "Tûrgāmâ on the Friday of the Passion of our Lord *(tûrgāmâ dʿal ʿrûbtâ dḥasheh dmāran)*" in *Tûrgāmê shtâ dqadîshâ māry yaqôb dsarûg malpānâ*, ed. Sebastian Brock (Glane/Losswer, Holland: Monastery of St Ephrem, 1984), 36–46

289. Brock, p. 37, ll. 14–15. ܠܐ ܫܒܘܩܐ ܐܢܐ ܨܠܡܢ ܕܢܚܫܠ ܒܫܝܘܠ

290. See Brock, pp. 45–46.

291. See S. Brock, "Baptismal Themes in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh," in *Symposium Syriacum 1976*, OCA 205 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1978), 325–347.

292. Syriac text in Paul Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1905–1909), 3:423.

In the homily on the faith, Jacob also introduces the alimentary images associated with the descent:

> All his life was hidden in him when he died,
> And when Death had swallowed up the dead one who was full of life.
> As ordinary food he devoured him, eating him,
> and life poured forth from him and choked him when he swallowed him.
> When he ate him he thought that he was a human being,
> but when he swallowed him he knew he tasted that he was God.[293]

Also in the homily on the faith, there is an extended passage that expresses the composite understanding of the Sheol for Jacob. The *memrâ* speaks of the the economy of salvation in Jesus in the metaphor of the way (*ʾûrḥâ*).[294] Jacob explains:

> . . . The end of the way, then, was the place of the dead:
> For in that place Adam was bound, so he came to free him.
> The Strong One entered the place of the dead Godlike,
> and he was able to go in since he came to it in the flesh.
> In the flesh he came and because of this he accepted the tomb.
> And he broke down Sheol, he entered in order to descend to it Godlike.
> Baptism, Mary, and Sheol were like rest stops
> to him on the way, and he consented to lodge in the three.
>
> The Word lodged in Mary for he consented to become a body,
> and he became flesh from her. The body of the Blessed One
> came to baptism and descend and put on by baptism
> the robe of glory that Adam had lost.
> Again he entered Sheol to free the captives there.
> For to the third rest stop hastened his every way.
> He resided in the virgin and came to birth, being God.
> Again baptism received him, and he was God.
> He descended to Sheol, and the world recognized that he was God.
> For he was not recognized until he arrived at the gates of Sheol:
> In the likeness of a new born he was wrapped in swaddling clothes at birth;
> With John as a person come for baptism.
> But when he arrived to enter Sheol the earth quaked,
> The dead were awakened, and the world recognized that he was God.

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293. Bedjan 3:615, ll. 7–13.

294. For an extended discussion, see F. Rilliet, "La métaphore du chemin dans la sotériologie de Jacques de Saroug," *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993): 324–331.

> The rulers of this world did not know him
> until he mounted the wood of the cross in order to enter Sheol.[295]

Jacob's extensive *mêmrâ* on the passion of the Lord has been divided by a later editor into eight sections that follow the course of the Liturgy of the Hours for the Pasch. In part seven, designated for *lelyâ* of Saturday, the death of the Lord and his descent to Sheol are treated. Jacob begins his exposition of the descent and the salvific events that transpired there with the loud cry of Jesus on the cross (Mt 27:50; Mk 15:37; Lk 23:46). Jacob explains:

> The graves were demolished at his voice, which shook them,
> And the dead went out to shout to him their hosannas.
> The city of death heard the voice, and its walls trembled.
> And its ramparts collapsed and gave way to his might.
> It was troubled and widened its ramparts and lowered its gates.
> For the voice of the Son knocked against it and fell upon its inhabitants.
> His voice went up to the heights and extinguished the lights;
> It descended to Sheol and brought up the dead from destruction.[296]

Jacob then takes up other traditional imagery—the "wedding feast of blood" *(ḥlôlâ dadmâ)*, flaming sword *(rûmḥâ dnûrâ)* guarding Paradise; the issue of blood and water from Jesus side—and then returns to Jesus' entry into Sheol. Jacob raises a series of rhetorical questions, asking who it could be that would go to Sheol, the place of the dead. He includes the question, "Who is this who, dying, gave new life / And behold who hastened to the hamlet of the dead and sought to enter it?"[297] Jacob then develops an extended analogy between Adam's expulsion from Paradise on the sixth day and Jesus' coming to retrieve him on the

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295. Bedjan, 3:592, l. 19–p. 593, l. 21. See also Bedjan 3:642, ll. 1–12.

296. Bedjan, 2:586, ll. 9–12.

297. Bedjan, 2:590, ll. 14–15

sixth day.[298] He takes up the descent, after explaining the parallel between the virgin womb and the new tomb.[299] Jesus put on the garment and colors of the dead and went to the place of the dead. The sight of him made the inhabitants of the place shake. He continues:

> He shined forth his light in the darkness and made them bright.
> And he opened mouths once stopped up and they shouted glory.[300]
>
> The lion's whelp roared in Sheol, and Death heard it.
> It trembled, was saddened, and cast its crown in the darkness.
> Adam heard the voice of the Son in the womb of Sheol,
> And he exalted before him like John [the Baptist] from within the belly.
> In the time of infancy, babes visited in the belly of their mother,
> In the land of the dead, the dead ones were lying in the womb of Sheol.[301]

These themes get further development in the section designated for *lelyâ* of Sunday of the Resurrection. During his three days in the place of the dead, the Son of God preached and announced the ruin of Sheol just as Jonah had preached in Nineveh that it would be overthrown. Jacob explains further the actions of Christ:

> He dove into the abyss, explored Sheol, and released Adam.
> Since the pit, her mouth, had grabbed him and choked on him.
> He felt around in the mud of the dead and sought the pearl
> that fell away from him, and he picked it up and ascended before his Parent.
> Death swallowed him like the great fish swallowed Jonah.
> And since he is not corruptible, it brought him up and yielded him in three days.
> The living one abided in the belly of Death three days,
> and in his resurrection he burst it open and went out mightily.[302]

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298. Bedjan, 2:592, ll. 3ff.

299. Bedjan, 2:593, ll. 6ff.

300. I am using the variant reading, ܕܫܬܝܩܢ for ܕܣܟܝܪܢ. Literally it reads, "And they shouted glory the stopped up mouths for he had opened them."

301. Bedjan, 2:595, ll. 1–9.

302. Bedjan, 2:599, ll. 1–8.

The rest of the homily is mainly concerned with explication of the account of the empty tomb, the reason for the guards, the angel's appearance, and Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene.

In his *mêmrâ* for the Sunday of the Resurrection, the descent motif appears at the beginning of Jacob's exposition. The homily is primarily controlled by contrasting the events of Friday with those of Sunday in a series of reversals.[303] Jacob declares: "On this day the lion's whelp *(gûryâ d'aryâ)* has knelt down on death / shattered its cave and brought forth the spoil that had been kept in it."[304] Jacob mentions without development the standard account of Christ's activity in Sheol: he breaks the gates, tramples the place of death, brings good tidings, light, and consolation.[305] He refers to Christ as the hero *(g[n]abārâ)* who tramples Sheol.[306]

Jacob presents an important witness to the development the descent motif in the literary tradition. Jacob fuses together the seemingly endless extensions of the descent motif, drawing in heretofor unassociated images. Like Narsai, Jacob also connects the descent to Sheol with the descent into the Jordan, specifically interpreting this in the direction of the restitution of Adam. In many cases he draws out allusions found in the earlier tradition, in particular the metaphor of Adam as the pearl of great value. Jacob brings in legal

303. For example, "The day before yesterday the spear, bitter things, vinegar and the crucifixion / today glory and the clamour of the watcher's praise" (Bedjan, 2:614, ll. 4–5).

304. Bedjan, 2:611, ll. 15–16.

305. See Bedjan, 2:612.

306. See Bedjan 2:622, ll. 12–13, inter alia.

terminology, diving imagery, and his recurring soteriological theme of the way or journey with its rest stops (or "staging posts") in the womb, the Jordan, and Sheol.[307]

Cyrus of Edessa (fl. mid sixth century)

Cyrus of Edessa is a sixth-century East Syrian theologian. According to the convention of the day, he wrote explanations of the liturgical feasts as a means of teaching about the economy of salvation. Cyrus's explanations also witness to the coalescing East Syrian theology. What is of particular interest here is the liturgical starting point for speaking about the mystery of redemption.[308] In particular, he "is most faithful in reproducing the teaching of Theodore, even with some of their inconsistencies, yet by changing the context of their synthesis [from biblical to liturgical], he has thereby inevitably changed somewhat their emphases and nuances."[309] However, they are "the best witness we have as to how the theology of Theodore was understood at the School of Nisibis in the early sixth century and how his ideas were synthesized in the context of the feasts of the liturgical cycle, which is the form in which they would have their most profound and lasting influence."[310] In light of this, how Cyrus takes up the descent motif in relation to liturgy is important for assessing the motif's development.

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307. Some further texts on Sheol and the descent that echo these themes can be found in Bedjan, 5:641–657, where Jacob treats Death and Satan and 2:334–347, a homily "On the Three Dead Ones Raised by the Lord."

308. See the remarks in the foreword of *Six Explanations of the Liturgical Feasts by Cyrus of Edessa*, ed. William F. Macomber, CSCO 355, Scriptores Syri 156 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1974).

309. William F. Macomber, "The Theological Synthesis of Cyrus of Edessa, an East Syrian Theologian of the Mid Sixth Century," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 30 (1964): 9.

310. Macomber, "Synthesis," 9.

The explanations offer a theological account of the meaning and reasons for the celebration of the particular feasts in question. An *ʿeltâ*—an "explanation" or "cause" or even "reasons for"—was the favored genre of the Nisibene school in the sixth to eighth century, used for theological reasoning or giving an account for something. They do not permit a reconstruction of a liturgical *ordo* or euchology. Macomber assigns 543 as the *termius a quo* and 551 as the *terminus ad quem* of Cyrus's explanations of the liturgical feasts.

In the explanation of the season of the Fast, Cyrus addresses the question of why the Church observes the liturgical season in the first place. Cyrus aligns himself with the understanding of the sacraments of Theodore of Mopsuestia, namely, that in this life the sacraments are a "type" *(tupsâ)* of our death and resurrection to new life in Christ. Cyrus explains that according to the promise of the Lord, in the world to come all will be immortal. He comments that in baptism Christians signify their burial with Christ by baptism in the "tomb of the font." In emerging from it "as though from the womb of Sheol" Christians manifest their resurrection with Christ.[311] Thus, human beings, through the sacraments, have passed into the future in type, living in a middle state between mortality and immortality.[312]

The explanation for the passion and the resurrection give brief mention to the descent into Sheol. Cyrus explains that Jesus lead the way in the battle against Satan and Death so that he could bolster his apostles' faith in the midst of adversity.[313] Because Adam and the entire human race with him were bound by Death, Jesus had to go and wrest the

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311. *Explanation of the Fast,* 2:5; Macomber, *Six Explanations,* p. 8.

312. See William Macomber, "Synthesis," 32–33.

313. *Explanation of the Passion,* 3:8; Macomber, *Six Explanations,* p. 76.

captives.[314] He further contrasts the disobedience of Adam and the obedience of Christ; Christ had to go and destroy the document of condemnation of Adam.[315] But Cyrus takes up the death of Christ and makes no mention of Sheol: Christ dies, his Spirit goes to Paradise, and the thief goes with him.[316]

When Cyrus discusses the resurrection, he takes pains to explain why there is a third-day resurrection and why it is on Sunday. Cyrus mentions Christ's activity in Sheol in passing, using the stock expressions of loosening the bonds of death and shattering the bars of Sheol.[317]

When Cyrus discusses why three days passed from death to resurrection, he says nothing about Sheol. The day in the earth was to reflect the visible order of creation: God rested on the Sabbath, so Christ rests among the dead.[318] The three days, he says, were necessary because if the resurrection came too soon, it would seem as if Christ's death were an illusion; longer than three, and the apostles might lose heart. Moreover, he says, the sign of Jonah had to be fulfilled, and the three days prove that the man Jesus died and was buried.[319]

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314. *Explanation of the Passion*, 3:9; Macomber, *Six Explanations*, p. 82.

315. *Explanation of the Passion*, 3:10; Macomber, *Six Explanations*, p. 82.

316. *Explanation of the Passsion*, 6:7–8; Macomber, *Six Explanations*, p. 90–91.

317. *Explanation of the Resurrection*, 2:7; Macomber, *Six Explanations*, p. 105–106.

318. *Explanation of the Resurrection*, 3:4; Macomber, *Six Explanations*, p. 107.

319. *Explanation of the Resurredction*, 4:6; Macomber, *Six Explanations*, p. 112.

The influence of a strict diophysitism leads Cyrus to account for how God could effect redemption through a human being *(byād barnāshā)*. God, Cyrus explains, is like a smith who uses iron pincers for his craft: By means of a rational human being, Christ the Lord, perfects us in the crucible of the resurrection.[320]

The Fifth-Sixth Century Writers: Assessment

There is a notable shift in the development of the descent motif as the literary tradition moves into the fifth and sixth centuries. The conceptual network of the descent motif enlarges. The images from previous realizations are drawn in and expanded. Legal metaphors become more common: Adam's sin resulted in his being sentenced to death and Sheol. Christ settles the bond and pay the debt so that Adam is restored to paradise. In the expansion of the semantic range, the Jordan language takes on more prominence. There is a possible indication in this linking of the descent to Sheol and the descent into the Jordan that the older, more mythic Sheol language is losing freight. Plunging into a river or pearl diving as metaphors might now be more compelling ways of expressing a more enigmatic descent to Sheol. Further, the twelve-syllable meter of Narsai and Jacob lends a more ponderous quality to the language as well.

The fifth to sixth centuries are also marked by developments in understanding the relationship between the humanity and divinity of Christ. The descent motif is carefully imbricated in this more complex theological network. As Jacob of Sarug's homily on the faith shows, the descent to Sheol is a critical point in the unfolding of the economy of salvation.

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320. See *Explanation of the Resurrection*, 2:8; Macomber, *Six Explanations*, p. 106.

Using the metaphor of the way, Jacob shows the internal rhythm and order from incarnation, baptism in the Jordan, and descent to Sheol. He connects the temporal aspects of Jesus' descent with the creation of Adam and his fall: the sixth day takes on theological weight. Jacob's homilies create a broad tableau in which all of the events of the economy of salvation are interrelated. Jacob's articulation of the theme absorbs and orders the OT and NT motifs, rather than juxtapose images in a seemingly endless succession.

Narsai's work also reflects contact with the christological projects of the day. While he does polemicize against the monophysites, for example, the descent theme resists the systematic theological precisions of the day. Narsai steps back, as it were, from a presentation of the descent motif in his paschal homilies, to address particular theological concerns: He leaves his narrative development to give doctrinal remarks, then returns to the narrative. In a certain sense, Narsai begins to dismantle the figurative language. The motif retains its opacity to the end that it frustrates attempts at analytical clarity. On the other hand, the language in which the decsent theme is cast shifts in this context. As the story is unfolded, the homilies draw attention to the human and divine natures in Christ and how he accomplished human salvation. Cyrus even omits the motif in his explanation of the reason for a third-day resurrection, which shows that some new questions of the day were not amenable to older formulae.

FINAL EVALUATION

The earliest Christian kerygma included the ambiguous pronouncement: God did not abandon Jesus to corruption in Sheol, but loosed the cords of death and raised him up (see Acts 2:24, 31–32). Itself steeped in OT imagery, the pronouncement enabled the first preachers to convince a Palestinian Jewish audience of the significance of the resurrection of Jesus in the economy of salvation that reaches from creation to Jesus' return in glory.

The earliest stratum of the Syriac literary tradition witnessed the continuation of the theme in diverse and complex texts like the *Odes of Solomon* and the *Acts of Thomas*. Here the mythicobiblical imagery of Sheol is expanded and developed into a conceptual network that keeps in tension the kerygmatic and soteriological themes the descent motif mediates. The motif is embedded in varied genric contexts, in particular prayer, preaching, and hymnody.

The golden period, whose most prominent authors are Aphrahat and Ephraem, marks a rich assimilation and transformation of the descent motif. These poets activate the hidden and fragmented traces of the descent in Scripture, appeal to the OT to augment the descent's credibility as a motif, and provide a narrative framework that structures the motif. The sequence of events and images can thus mediate a central tenet of the Christian faith. The juxtapositions of biblical and natural images augment the descent motif, expanding its semantic possibility. At the same time, the narrative structure links the descent to other key moments in salvation history, in particular the incarnation and final resurrection of the dead. The conventions of the poetic and liturgical genres used by the authors also contribute to the

often lively explorations of images and events described in the Bible. These genres contribute to the way that the descent motif resists a sedimentation of imagery and meaning. The descent motif connects with the life of the people in their celebration of the Pasch of Christ, the turn of the seasons, the cycles of birth and digestion, and political struggle,which in the case of the NH, it even interprets.

A more theoretical account of the intersecting and interweaving of genres and images would have to consider the strategies of a distinctively Syriac literary imagination in this period.[321] Three strategies will be summarily considered here: reinscription, amplification, and embedding. First, the texts' point of departure is the intersection of their audience's present lives with the past and future mediated in the biblical texts. They combine and recombine snippets of biblical text to weave together a new text that is vital and vivid and shows that paschal faith still makes claims on them and their future. They take events, images, and characters inscribed in the biblical texts, and imaginatively reinscribe them in hymns, homilies, and commentaries. The reinscription has a double implication. First, it projects the concrete images and metaphors of the biblical text into a larger narrative reconstrual. The temporal and spatial conundrums of the biblical text invite the poets to create a conceptual network that mediates meaning to the contemporary hearers. Second, the reinscription has the effect of transforming the assimilated texts into radically new figurative systems that mediate the tradition in a productive way: These texts are taken up because of their capacity to transform the contemporary hearer.

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321. A full hermeneutical reflection on this 'Syriac imagination' of the poets that takes into account the role of ܐܙܪܐ (*râzâ)* is beyond the scope of this investigation, which is ordered to liturgical discourse

The second strategy is closely related to reinscription. The biblical texts are taken up in homiletic and hymnic genres. Under the influence of these genres, the meanings of the biblical texts inscribed are amplified. An organic vision of the biblical text, that is, one that takes the OT and NT as intimately related and interconnected, leads the authors to create semantic links that build up complex relations between events and images in the unfolding of the larger narrative, salvation history. The decent to Sheol is thus confronted in its ambiguity. To augment the credibility of the motif, to negotiate its ambiguity, and to confront its indeterminacies, the poets expand the range of semantic possibility by appealing to the whole symbol system of the Bible. They use analogy, antithesis, paradox, negation, juxtaposition, and characterization in order to create new texts. Moreover, the meaning of the descent motif is augmented by the cumulative effect of its use. Under the innovative force of poetic composition, the proliferation of images extends meaning in order to create a new world of possibility.

The third strategy follows upon amplification. The amplification is accomplished by embedding images and events within a larger narrative frame. Three ways of embedding come into play.[322] The first involves calling up a fragment because it allows the narrative to be furthered. Here the encounter with Satan and Death, the illumination, the destruction of bars and gates, elements of the mythical system are used to augment and emplot a narrative. Aphrahat's exemplary sequence is an example.

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322. I am drawing on Laurent Jenny's classifications of isotopic and nonisotopic embedding. See Jenny, 52–54.

The second form of embedding involves drawing in a fragment to clarify the passage because the fragment has a semantic analogy to the text under consideration. By embedding it, all of the remembered associations of the fragment enrich the new text. Thus, Ephraem's appeal to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt links it with the "exodus" of Christ from Sheol. With this comes as well his formulation of Nisan in Sheol, the contrast of the righteous and unrighteous and the linking of destruction and liberation, for example.

The third technique involves inserting a textual fragment that has no a priori relation. The embedding spontaneously produces new, previously unrealized meanings. A particular example is the set of anonymous Holy Week homilies. Here, the homilies appeal to Jacob and Rachel in Genesis 28–33. There is no ostensible reason that this narrative is related to the decsent to Sheol, but it becomes a vehicle for linking the descent to yet another element of the unfolding of the economy of salvation. A further example is Ephraem's use of natural imagery in the NH to explain resurrection from the dead: the chick emerges from the egg. Here the motif is developed by exploring the potentiality of disparate texts and images.

In the fifth and sixth centuries, the authors continue these strategies in a shifting theological climate. Jacob and Narsai in particular witness that the descent into Sheol maintains its innovative force as it is realized in particular poetic instances. However, there are four trends that characterize the descent motif in this period. First, the motif is integrated more fully into a redemptive scheme that situates it at the center of salvation history to which the contemporary believer has sacramental access. The controlling image becomes descent, so that series of descents and ascents are linked: the womb of Mary, the Jordan river, Sheol, and the Christian's descent and ascent in baptism. Second, the trend is toward a

condensation of events and figures. While previous manifestations of the descent involved lengthier notice of OT figures, the trend is to name Adam alone in their stead. Jacob of Sarug's development shows how the narrative becomes quite complex as it presents the restitution of Adam, the pearl of great price, to Paradise as the dominant outcome of the descent to Sheol. Third, there are signs of a dissolution of mythic language. While this may be attributed to the influence of doctrinal language, there also seems to be a certain dismantling of the mythic language taking place in favor of more concrete images from the life world of the Syriac church, like pearl diving and journeys. Fourth, a more frequent use of legal language gives a subtle shift to the soteriology. Adam's sin incurred a debt to be paid by Christ. The bond of punishment is erased by Christ, who pays Adam's debt by his death on the cross. The notion of reparation or atonement is juxtaposed with the older imagery of Christ's putting on a body to be able to go to Sheol to restore Adam to paradise.[323]

Toward the end of the Golden Period, the first clear evidence of liturgical compilation and composition surfaces. The descent motif, already a key motif in the homiletic and hymnic genres of the writers, is taken into the liturgical texts. However, as the next chapter will show, the liturgical texts are not a fossilization of the tradition but break the language and refigure it at the intersection of text and community at worship.

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323. See Gérard-Henry Baudry, "Le Retour d'Adam au Paradis, symbole du salut de l'humanité," *Mélanges de Science Religieuse* 51 (1994): 117–148.

CHAPTER 4
THE LITURGICAL TRADITION

Having set out the context of the imagery of the descent to Sheol used to express the meaning of Christ's death in the literary tradition, I now examine how the liturgy employs the potentiality of the symbols and metaphors that compose the motif. The liturgy's creative appropriation of symbolic elements not only draws on the available tradition but makes its own contribution to the content and authority of the motif as a constitutive expression of redemption effected by Christ. Moreover the appropriation of the motif is not neutral. As will become clear, it can subvert and distort the motif by exploiting its connection to invective.

In this chapter I will first give a brief history of liturgy in the East Syrian region to contextualize the development of liturgical texts and highlight features of this history that contribute to its particularity. The history of the redaction of the East Syrian liturgy is one element in the appropriation of the descent motif. Then, I will examine the liturgies in which the descent motif plays a capital role by exploring the psalmody, euchology, lections, hymnody, and prescribed ritual actions of the celebration of the Pasch and Epiphany (in Syriac, *denḥâ*). I will then make more general observations about the baptismal and

eucharistic liturgies that are central to both of these yearly feasts and express in ritual or textual fashion the descent motif. Finally I will assess this exposition in light of the particularity of the liturgical tradition with an eye to raising questions about how the liturgy both absorbs and erases the motif.

HISTORICAL PANORAMA OF THE EAST SYRIAN LITURGY

The variety of nomenclature for the churches of the East Syrian tradition merits a preliminary comment. Most recently, the convention has been to name those who are in union with Rome the *Chaldean* Church or the *Chaldean Catholic* Church. The name *Chaldean* was first used in 1445 by Pope Eugenius IV to distinguish newly reconciled "Nestorians" from those members of the Church of the East who did not unite with Rome, general termed "Assyrians." The autocephalous Church of the East tends toward the name *Assyrian Church of the East* or *Church of the East*, while the uniate Church prefers the title *Chaldean Catholic Church*. It used to be common to identify the nonuniate Church as the *Nestorian* Church; however, such nomenclature is incorrect.[1] Furthermore, in November 1994 the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church signed a "Common Christological Declaration," ending centuries of discord and paving the way for fuller unity between the two churches that preserve a common liturgical and spiritual patrimony.[2] Members of the Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church are spread throughout the world, with greatest

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1. See Sebastian Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78 (1996): 23–35.

2. The text is available at *http://www.cired.org/cat/declare.html*.

numbers in Iraq, Southern Turkey, Iran, and most recently the United States (especially Illinois, Michigan, and California). In addition there is the Malabar or Syro-Malabar Church in India and in diaspora that uses the same liturgy.

Beginnings to the Fifth Century

A thorough and critical history of the East Syrian liturgy is still wanting. In the past century Syrian liturgies have received particular attention by a small number of European and American liturgical specialists and a growing number of Indian scholars.[3] Scholars have generally traced two lines of influence on the development of the early Syriac tradition in general, which was then extended to the East Syrian liturgy in particular. The first line of thinking posits a substantial influence of Jewish liturgical traditions on early Syrian Christianity. The second traces the origins of the Syriac-speaking churches to Antioch, a strongly hellenized church. Following the typical line of thinking, East Syrian liturgy has its roots in the liturgical tradition of Antioch (as do the West Syrian and Maronite rites) influenced by Jewish liturgical usages.

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3. Seminal work has been done by Anton Baumstark, Juan Mateos, Alphonsus Raes, Ignatius Ephraem Rahmani, Sarhad Y. Hermiz Jammo, William Macomber, and Pierre Yousif. Bernard Botte studied the anaphora, and Irenée-Henri Dalmais and Louis Ligier also studied aspects of the Syrian liturgy. Robert Taft's examination of the divine office remains standard; Gabriele Winkler has studied the office and initiation rites. More recently Bryan Spinks and Gerard Rouwhorst have looked into the origin and structure of East Syrian liturgy and euchology. See *A classified bibliography on the East Syrian liturgy/La bibliographie classifiée de la liturgie syrienne orientale*, ed. Pierre Yousif (Rome: Mar Thoma Yogam, 1990). For the relative explosion of studies by Syro-Malabar Indian scholars, the publications of the Mar Thoma Yogam in Rome are representative. A number of these publications originate as doctoral theses defended at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome.

In a seminal article William Macomber reexamined this second assumption.[4] Following Macomber, the ordinary assumption that the East Syrian liturgy is a branch of the Antiochene liturgy is false. Rather, attention to the eucharistic and baptismal liturgies suggests that the East Syrian liturgy is *sui generis*. He proposes that around 400, there were three major liturgical centers: Antioch, Jerusalem, and Edessa. While the Antiochene rite was followed by the Greek-speaking region and the Jerusalem rite in Palestine, the Syriac-speaking Christians to the East followed the rite of Edessa. How uniform this rite was, however, is sheer speculation, since the documentary evidence is scant. The synod held in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410 intended to organize the Church of the East following a period of persecution. It called for the rite used by the bishops of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (near Babylon) and Maypriqaṭ (to the north at the source of the Tigris) to replace local variants.[5] Macomber judges that the rite in question is that of Edessa, which came to prevail throughout the region, but there is no empirical evidence to support his assumption. The upheaval after the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) led to further developments. The monophysites took over Edessa, while the followers of Theodore of Mopsuestia, subsequently known as "Nestorians" for their adherence to Theodore's student, took up residence in Nisibis and continued the Edessene usage in Persia until the Arab invasions in the seventh century forced restructuring.

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4. William F. Macomber, "A Theory on the Origins of the Syrian, Maronite and Chaldean Rites," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973): 235–242.

5. See *Synodicon Orientale, ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, ed. J. B. Chabot (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), p. 27, ll. 5–7 (canon 13). The year 410 marks the end of thirty years of official persecution in the Persian Church with the proclamation of tolerance by the Persian emperor Yazdgard.

Scant sources survive for tracing the elements and characteristics of the so-called antique Edessene rite. I will consider two points about the liturgy in this region in the earliest era because they touch on the issues of genre and performance of liturgical texts. First, the early Syriac-speaking Christian communities of the region had a distinctive euchological pattern. As noted in chapter 3, the extant witnesses are few. Most scholars turn to the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* and *Acts of John* as witnesses for liturgical practice in the late third century. However, these sources testify more to the diversity of local and occasional performances outside of the main cities and to a coalescing oral tradition. The missionary setting, the distinctive theological construct of the Acts, and their literary genre offer the scholar a snapshot of fluid forms and evolving patterns in a period gradually moving to fixed forms of prayer. The accounts of liturgical prayer in the Acts suggest a developing form of a strongly epicletic euchology.[6] While epiclesis in these prayers is highly developed compared to Western Greek texts of the same pre-fourth century period, the close connection of epiclesis to anamnestic litanies or kerygma needs to be maintained.[7]

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6. These texts have been studied in detail by Gabriele Winkler, "Nochmals zu den Anfängen der Epiklese und des Sanctus im Eucharistischen Hochgebet," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 174 (1994): 214–231; "Weitere Beobachtungen zur frühen Epiklese (den Doxologie und dem Sanctus). Über die Bedeutung der Apokryphen für die Einforschung der Entwicklung der Riten," *Oriens Christianus* 80 (1996): 177–200. See also Gerard A. M. Rouwhorst, "La célébration de l'eucharistie selon les Actes de Thomas," in *Omnes Circumadstantes. Contributions towards the History of the Role of the People in the Liturgy presented to Herman Wegman*, ed. C. Caspers and M. Schneider (Kampen: Kok, 1990), 51–77.

7. In particular I find that Winkler's isolation of the epicletic prayer leads to an exaggerated claim that the original prayers over oil and bread in Syria were pure epicleses. Rather these invocations need to be situated in a context that includes kerygma/anamnesis and formulae for the application/consumption of the elements.

The distinctive euchological pattern appears in what many scholars judge the oldest extant anaphora, the anaphora of Addai and Mari, the core of which dates to the early third century.[8] Unlike Antiochene anaphoras, whose subgenres are arranged anamnesis-supper narrative-epiclesis-intercession, Addai and Mari places the epiclesis as the last element, leading into the doxology. It is a fairly undeveloped epiclesis, compared to the more lengthy epicleses of the Acts. The anaphora has a Sanctus, but lacks a supper narrative—the characteristic that has attracted the most scholarly debate.[9] The anaphora was originally in Syriac and not translated from the Greek, so it is a significant witness to the development of the anaphora in this region.[10] The anaphora is still used today, and I will discuss its allusion to the descent motif below.

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8. See most recently Anthony Gelston, *The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992). However, there are certain infelicitous translations and a typographical error in the Syriac text (p. 50, l. 24 should read [illegible] for [illegible]), and Gelston's commentary on the epiclesis of this prayer is seriously flawed. See the further comments of Gabriele Winkler, "Zur Erforschung orientalischen Anaphoren in liturgievergleichender Sicht I: Anmerkungen zur Oratio post Sanctus und Anamnese bis Epiklese," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 63 (1997): 399, n. 68 and n. 69.

9. See the resume in Gelston, 109–110. See also Emmanuel J. Cutrone who suggests that the setting for the supper narrative was at a communion blessing; "The Liturgical Setting of the Institution Narrative in the Early Syrian Tradition," in *Time and Community: Studies in Liturgical History and Theology in Honor of Thomas Julian Talley*, ed. J. Neil Alexander (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1990), 105–114.

10. Bryan Spinks's observations about a common oral tradition that developed into the anaphora of Addai and Mari and its "sister" prayer the Maronite Third Anaphora of St Peter have been the most methodologically sound observations about the prayer. See *Addai and Mari—The Anaphora of the Apostles: A Text for Students*, ed. Bryan Spinks, Grove Liturgical Studies 24, (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1980), 12, 24–29; and idem, "Addai and Mari and the Institution Narrative: The Tantalizing Evidence of Gabriel Qatraya," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 98 (1984): 60–67. I concur with Gelston that the attempts to find in Addai and Mari a Christianized *birkat ha-mazon* "must be adjudged a failure" (10). This is most recently the position of G. A. M. Rouwhorst, inter alia. See his "Bénédiction, action de grâces, supplication. Les oraisons de la table dans le Judaïsme et les célébrations eucharistiques des Chrétiens syriaques," *Questions Liturgiques* 61 (1980): 211–240.

The second observation about the formative period of the East Syrian liturgy concerns the development of the liturgy of the word. As the house-church and missionary celebrations gave way to larger-scale public celebrations, the East Syrian Christians built churches, the oldest of which date from the fourth century, whose apses were filled with an altar, rather than the seats for clergy that are found in the rest of the East and West. In the middle of the nave is a large walled-in platform known as the *bêmâ* that contains a throne used for the gospel book and cross and seats for the bishop and clergy.[11] Ephraem himself alludes to the function of the *bêmâ* in a passage of the *Hymns on Nicomedia*, which are extant in their Armenian recension. In his poetic vision lamenting the fate of Nicomedia, he describes that "the reading of Scripture and the alleluias of the psalms" cease and "the order of reading was abolished." The *bêmâ*, he explains, "was built in the middle," a source to which "eager ears rushed" for the teaching they received there.[12] Further Ephraem explains that with the

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11. The distinctive liturgical character of this structure was first studied in detail by Robert Taft, "Some Notes on the Bema in the East and West Syrian Tradition," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 34 (1968): 326–359. See also "On the Use of the Bema in the East-Syrian Liturgy," *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970): 30-39. These two articles have been reprinted with "notes and comments" to update them in *Liturgy in Byzantium and Beyond*, Collected Studies 493 (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variourum, 1995). The most recent study is Erich Renhart, "Encore une Fois: Le Bēmā des Églises de la Syrie du Nord," *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995): 85–94; and idem, "Das syrische Bema. Liturgisch-archäologische Untersuchungen," *Grazer Theologische Studien* 20 (1995): 32–34, which reports on his doctoral dissertation on the *bêmâ* at Graz. For a survey of the whole region's liturgical space, see Pauline Donceel-Voûte, "La Mise en scène de la liturgie au Proche Orient IV[e]–IX[e] s.: les 'provinces liturgiques,'" in *The Christian East: Its Institutions and its Thought: A Critical Reflection*, ed. Robert Taft, OCA 251 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1996), 313–338. She treats the *bêmâ* on 325–326, 333–336. See also Rouwhorst, "Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997): 74–76, 84.

12. Mêmrâ 8, ll. 611–626. Especially l. 15, ". . . *բեմն որ շինեցին ի միջի / եղև աղբի՛ւր ի միջի.*" *Éphrem de Nisibe Mēmrē sur Nicomédie*, ed. Charles Renoux, Patrologia Orientalis 37 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), 150–152. Rouwhorst brought this reference to liturgists' attention in "Jewish Liturgical Traditions," 75.

destruction of the church, the Christian flock would no longer graze at the *bêmâ* on "various songs coming from the psalms, parables and figures coming from the hymns, and in the homily, the treasures of Scriptures."[13]

With regard to what "order of readings" was read at the *bêmâ* and how much is far from certain. Baumstark argued that the earliest Syriac lectionary reflects the continuation of a synagogal system that was coming to be replaced by new Christian material drawn from a variety of sources of different provenance.[14] Before the seventh century, several lectionary systems coexisted. One witness, dubbed the early Syriac lectionary (MS London, British Library, Additional 14528), shows an exuberance for Old Testament lections.[15] In the

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13. Mêmrâ 8, ll. 655–660. "*Ի սաղմոսից նուա՛գս նուագս։ / և ի նուագաց առա՛կս և աւրինակս. / և թարգմամութեան. գա՛նձս և գիրս*"

14. Anton Baumstark, "Neuerschlossene Urkunden Altchristliche Perikopenordinung des Ostaramäischen Sprachgebietes," *Oriens Christianus* (1927):5–10. Baumstark's findings have been nuanced and reaffirmed most recently by K. D. Jenner, "The Development of Syriac Lectionary Systems," *The Harp* 10 (1997): 9–24. Jenner shows the liturgical scholar that no history of the lectionary systems can be made without attending to the marginal notes in the oldest Peshitta manuscripts.

15. F. C. Burkitt, "The early Syriac Lectionary System," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 10 (1923): 301–338. In western terminology this is more accurately a *capitulare* (a list of pericopes) rather than a full lectionary. It should be noted that Merja Merras has argued a *terminus ante quem* of Burkitt's early lectionary as the last decade of the fourth century, because there seems to be no paschal baptism, and a *terminus post quem* of 351 because it includes lections for a feast of the vision of the cross. See her "The Date of the Earliest Syriac Lectionary, Br. M. Add. 14.528," in *Symposium Syriacum VII*, ed. René Lavenant, Orientalia Christiana Periodica 256 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1998), 575–585. Rouwhorst, however, does not mention this lectionary and argues that the pattern attested by the *Apostolic Constitutions* (*Les Constitutions Apostoliques*, ed. Marcel Metzger, Sources Chrétiennes 320, 329, 336 [Paris: Cerf, 1985–1987], 2.57.5 and 2.39.6; cf. 8.5.11) represents the primitive pattern of the early "Syriac Church." In AC four readings before the Gospel are mentioned, two Old Testament and two New Testament. The Old Testament readings are divided into Law (Torah) and Prophets. The historical books seem to be reckoned with the Torah and the sapiential books with the prophets. The New Testament is divided into Acts, Epistle, and the Gospel. See Rouwhorst, "Jewish Liturgical Traditions," and idem, "Continuity and Discontinuity between Jewish and Christian Liturgy," *Bijdragen* 54 (1993), 72–83. However, the provenance of AC is western, in the region of Antioch. Rather than being the primitive pattern for the whole region, the

seventh century, the liturgical reform of Ishô'yahb III led to a standardization of the lectionary system and fixed the number of readings to four for the East Syrian Church. The revised lectionary reflects the influence of the Jerusalem system and the confluence of cathedral and monastic systems.

As discussed in the previous chapter and alluded to in the Nicomedian hymn, the singing of *madrāshê, sôgyātâ*, and perhaps *mêmrê* complemented the proclamation of Scripture.[16] I have already attended to the liturgical character of these genres and considered their possible contexts when treating Ephraem's works. In broader terms, Ephraem's works further attest to the significance of baptism and eucharist in the life of the fourth-century Syriac-speaking churches. Pierre Yousif's major study sets out the rich themes and underlying theology of the eucharist in Ephraem.[17] Ephraem himself, though, did not bequeath a prolific corpus of liturgical texts like orations and anaphoras. Given that Ephraem was most likely a deacon and certainly a *malpānā* (honored teacher), his duties as a "pastoral minister" (*'allānâ*) centered on teaching through hymns, commentaries, and dialogue poems. The bishop would have been the president of the liturgical assembly, charged with leading

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presence of multiple systems of selecting and arranging the readings may have be operative. Rouwhorst also implies a monolithic and documentable synagogue practice. The work of Stefan Reif should be taken into consideration. See his *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 53–87.

16. The Synod of 410 also prescribed that the deacon should make a proclamation (*kārôzûtâ*) before the scriptures. See the canons of this synod in *Synodicon*, pp. 263–273, here canon 13.

17. Pierre Yousif, *L'Eucharistie chez saint Éphrem de Nisibe*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 224 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1984). See also Joseph Amar, "Perspectives on the Eucharist in Ephrem the Syrian," *Worship* 61 (1987): 441–454; and Sidney H. Griffith, "'Spirit in the Bread; Fire in the Wine': The Eucharist as 'Living Medicine' in the Thought of Ephraem the Syrian," *Modern Theology* 15 (1999): 225–246.

the orations and anaphora, while the other ministers, like Ephraem, would have charge of the *madrāshê* and other liturgical poetry. The bishop would more likely have crafted liturgical texts in the guided freedom of extemporaneous prayer or used written texts as an *aide-mémoire*, given that the early fourth century is the beginning of the period that moves from an extemporaneous anaphora to fixed formulae.[18]

Further clues about the composition of liturgical texts comes from the School of Nisibis and the work of Narsai, both of which had great influence on the developing East Syrian liturgy. Narsai's literary legacy includes a number of liturgical compositions. In addition to the genres already considered, the historiography makes mention of shorter pieces of liturgical material: *bûyāyê*, "consolatory discourse" (probably a type of oration), *tûrgāmê*, used to name expository anthems before the Epistle and Gospel; *teshbḥatâ*, refrains attached to a psalm or independent songs of praise; *kārôzwātâ*, the diaconal litanies or biddings.[19]

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18. See R. P. C. Hanson, "The Liberty of the Bishop to Improvise Prayer in the Eucharist," *Vigiliae Christianae* 15 (1961): 173–176; and Alan Bouley, *From Freedom to Formula: The Evolution of the Eucharistic Prayer from Oral Improvisation to Written Texts*, Catholic University of America Studies in Christian Antiquity 21 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1981). The allusion in the eleventh-century Chronicle of Seert that Ephraem "composed a Mass" still used by the Melkites in the eleventh century and used in Nisibis until the seventh century seems an improbable attribution, especially if an anaphora is envisioned. (*Histoire Nestorienne Inédite [Chronique de Séert]*, ed. Addai Scher, Patrologia Orientalis 4 [1907], 295). The French translation of the Arabic text on line 8 reads, "Il composa une messe dont se servent encore les Melchites." (I gather from a native Arabic speaker that the French is misleading; "He prayed the liturgy" is closer to the Arabic original. However the Arabic word used did recall to me the typical designation of the anaphora in the East Syrian liturgy, *qûdshâ*.) Yousif himself explains he could not find a trace of such an anaphora. The prayer *ephreticum* that Yousif analyzes could well be the work of a later redactor who borrowed Ephraem's phraseology and attributed it to him to bolster its authority. I also find no compelling reason to consider the *praeces* an anaphora. See Yousif, 145–150.

19. See Arthur Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis*, CSCO 266 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1965), 86–87 for manuscript witnesses for Narsai's compositions. Elishâ Bar Qûzbāyê (d. 510), a successor of Narsai (whether immediately after or not is a matter of rival traditions), is reported to have composed ܩܘܒܠ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ, literally a "gracious acceptance" or "thanksgiving." When

Structuration (Sixth–Seventh Century): Reform of Ishô' yahb III

In the aftermath of the doctrinal controversies and ecclesiastical division in the fifth century, the diversity and variety of local usages gradually give way to more consolidation and structuring in the sixth century.[20] Patriarch Abâ I (540–552) traveled widely before becoming patriarch in 540. He is credited with having brought back the works of Nestorius with him and having them translated from Greek to Syriac. According to headings of later manuscripts, he also is reputed to have brought back two new anaphoras, which he supposedly had translated from Greek to Syriac, and introduced them into the liturgy. The first is attributed to Theodore of Mospsuestia and the other to Nestorius.[21] Abâ I is also credited with introducing other liturgical souvenirs in the form of the Trisagion and the

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they were used is not clear. Vööbus, 128. The information comes from 'Abdishô'.

20. For brief historical accounts, see Pierre Yousif, "Appunti sulla preghiera liturgica del rito caldeo e malabarese" (Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome, 1983, photocopy); and P. Yousif, "The Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Assyro-Chaldean Church," in *The Eucharistic Liturgy in the Christian East*, ed. John Madey (Kerala and Paderborn: Prakasam and Eastern Church Service, 1982), 175–237, and idem, "Le Déroulement de la messe chaldéene," in *Eucharistie: Célébrations, rites, piétés* (Rome: CLV, 1995).

21. The attributions are honorific. While the report of a translation of a Greek anaphora into Syriac comes from the colophons of many manuscripts, the historicity of this matter has come under scholarly reevaluation. There is a growing argument that both anaphoras are original Syriac compositions. On Theodore, see J. Vadakkel, *The East Syrian Anaphora of Mar Theodore of Mopsuestia: Critical Edition, English Translation and Study* (Kottayam: OIRSI Publications, 1989), and Pierre Yousif, "The Anaphora of Mar Theodore: East Syrian; Further Evidences," in *ΕΥΛΟΓΗΜΑ: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, S.J.*, ed. E. Carr, et al., Studia Anselmiana 110 (Analecta liturgica 17) (Rome: Sant'Anselmo, 1993), 571–591. On Nestorius, see A. Gelston, "The Origin of the Anaphora of Nestorius: Greek or Syriac," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78 (1996), 73–86, and Bryan Spinks, "The Anaphora of Nestorius: Antiochene Lex Credendi through Constantinopolitan Lex Orandi," *Orientalia Christian Periodica* 62 (1996): 273–294. On these anaphoras in general, see Bryan Spinks, *Worship: Prayers from the East* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1993).

'Angel of Peace' litany.[22] He is also reputed to have composed many *mêmrê*, *tûrgāmê*, and antiphonal *qānônê*.[23] The sixth century also marked the end of the catechumenate and its associated rituals like the dismissals.[24]

A powerful influence on liturgical development following the Arab conquest and collapse of the Persian empire comes from Ishôʿyahb III (b. 580–d. 659) at the upper monastery of Mar Gabriel in Mosul.[25] He is credited with an extensive liturgical standardization and reform that involved the liturgical books and the calendar. Ishôʿ yahb III redacted a liturgical book of continuing importance, the *ḥûdrâ*.[26] The *ḥûdrâ* contains all

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22. The Byzantine Trisagion, originally an entrance antiphon with psalm, is now chanted in the Byzantine liturgy after the little entrance. The 'Angel of Peace' litany, that is the αἰτήσεις, which concludes with the prayer of inclination, is part of the pre-anaphoral rites in the Byzantine liturgy and at the conclusion of Byzantine morning and evening prayer. The East Syrian liturgy inserted the Trisagion before the scripture proclamation and introduced both a Byzantine *synaptē* litany (the *bāʿutâ)* and the *aitēseis* at the end of its liturgy of the word.

23. The loan-word from Greek (κανών) betrays its inspiration. It is a poetic refrain for psalmody. The term is also used for a group of psalms and their refrains, as well as the equivalent of an *ekphronesis*. Vööbus discusses Mār Abâ I's literary legacy, 166–168. For a musicological account of the history of the *qālê*, poetic versicles attached to a psalm, often supplicatory, see Heinrich Husmann, "Zur Geschichte des Qala," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 45 (1979): 99–113.

24. Macomber, "A History of the Chaldean Mass," *Worship* 51 (1977): 111–112. The information comes from the commentary of Gabriel Qaṭrayâ, which dates from the early seventh. See S. H. Jammo, *La Structure de la Messe Chaldéenne du Début jusqu'à l'Anaphore. Etude historique*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 207 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1979), 13–25. Information from synods in this period gives some indication of liturgical practices. A letter of Mār Abâ I calls for preaching on the gospel and other readings (in *Synodicon*, p. 549 [syr.]). Synod of George I in 676 admonished the faithful to stay at the liturgy through the blessing and directed them not to go to the monasteries for liturgy on feast days but to the local churches (canon 15) (in *Synodicon*, 244 [syr.]).

25. See J. M. Fiey, "Išōʿyaw le Grand. Vie du catolicos nestorien Išōʿyaw III d'Adiabene (580–659)," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 35 (1969): 305–333.

26. ܚܘܕܪܐ means "cycle" or "circle" or "course." See the discussion of Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Webers Verlag, 1922; reprinted W. de Gruyter, 1968), 197–199.

of the proper texts for the office and eucharist for the Sundays and feasts of the year, except some more recent feasts. It conformed much of the usage to the liturgy of Mar Gabriel, also known as the Upper Monastery, on the bank of the Tigris River near Mosul. In conjunction with the arrangement of the liturgical material, Ishôʿ yahb III is also reputed to have fixed the liturgical cycle. The East Syrian liturgical cycle is designated *shaboʿe*.[27] The seasons are as follows: Annunciation (4 weeks), Epiphany (7 weeks), Fast (7 weeks), Resurrection (7 weeks), Apostles (7 weeks), Summer (7 weeks), Elias (7 weeks), Moses (7 weeks), and Dedication (4 weeks). However, due to the date of Pasch and Nativity/Epiphany, the seasons are often shortened.[28]

Further textual reform by Ishôʿ yahb III fixed the number of anaphoras at three (Addai and Mari, Theodore, and Nestorius) and assigned when they would be used.[29] He is

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27. The root ܫܒܥ means "seven." It reveals the origins of this system of reckoning as a *pentecostade*, made up of *pentecoste*, a fifty-day period of seven weeks plus one day. This is a common way that the cultures of Mesopotamia and West Asia marked time. They reckoned a year by seven *pentecoste* and a week, giving a lunar year of 357 days. Additional days are intercalated to conform to a solar year. For a short history and relevant texts, see Ephrem Carr, "The Liturgical Year in the Syriac Churches: Adaptation to Different Ecclesial-Liturgical Ambients," in *L'Adattamento Culturale della Liturgia: Metodi e Modelli*, ed. Ildebrando Scicolone, Analecta Liturgica 19 (Studia Anselmiana 113) (Rome: Sant'Anselmo, 1993), 47–59.

28. In particular, the season of Moses is rarely more then four weeks, and often just one Sunday. Summer is markedly penitential, and the finding of the cross is commemorated in the season of Elias. See Juan Mateos, *Lelya-Ṣapra. Les Offices chaldéens de la nuit et du matin*, 2d ed., Orientalia Christiana Analecta 156 (Rome: P.I.O, 1972), 14–16.

29. He may also have revised the texts of the anaphoras, as well. Macomber cites an eleventh century author Ibn aṭ-Tayyib, who suggests that Addai and Mari was shortened since it was the most frequently used anaphora. See Macomber, 112–13. At issue here is whether Ishoʿyahb III removed the institution narrative or whether Addai and Mari never had one. Also, there do appear to be traces of other anaphoras. Robert Connolly edited fragments of an anaphora he dates to the sixth-century. See R. H. Connolly, "Sixth-Century Fragments of an East-Syrian Anaphora," *Oriens Christianus* 12–14 (1925): 99–128. P. Yousif cites mention of an anaphora by Diodore at the Diamper Synod, the one by Ephraem mentioned above, one attributed to Abdîshô of Nisibis, and to Barsauma,

reputed to have drawn up the *ordo* or *euchologion* called the *ṭaksâ*.[30] As he compiled the rites of baptism, pardon, ordination, and consecration of a church/altar, he may well have revised them. Connected with these new liturgical books, Ishôʿyahb III apparently composed a commentary on the revised liturgy. It is lost, but later commentaries cite it heavily. Ishôʿyahb III's theological interpretations took on a particular weight and came to serve as the model interpretation for the tradition.[31] He is also credited with celebrated liturgical refrains and *madrāshê*.[32] Finally, he established the norms for the liturgy of the hours, setting the cathedral and monastic cycle that has been preserved up to the present.

Information about subsequent interpolations and ritual changes in the liturgy comes from liturgical commentaries.[33] The seventh-century commentary of Gabriel Bar Lipāh Qaṭrāyâ describes a liturgy much the same as the modern.[34] His relative Abraham Bar Lipāh

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all lost. See "The Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Assyro-Chaldean Church," in *The Eucharistic Liturgy in the Christian East*, ed. John Madey (Kerala and Paderborn: Prakasam and Eastern Church Service, 1982), 178.

30. ܛܟܣܐ is a Greek loan-word (τάξις). It contains the rubrics and ordinary for the liturgies.

31. The commentary is referred to frequently in the ninth-century anonymous commentary. Macomber explains that this commentary "seems to have set down the theological sense of the ceremonies, thus investing them with a sacrosanct quality resistant to change" (113).

32. See Vööbus, 298.

33. On the importance and popularity of liturgical commentaries in the East Syrian tradition, see William Macomber, "The Liturgy of the Word According to the Commentators of the Chaldean Mass," in *The Word in the World: Essays in Honor of Frederick L. Moriarty, S.J.*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and George W. MacRae (Cambridge, Mass.: Weston College Press, 1973), 179–190.

34. Still unedited (British Museum Additional MS 14.471). A Latin translation of the sections pertaining to the eucharistic liturgy is available in Jammo, 29–48. See the remarks of Yousif, "Divine Liturgy," 186, and Macomber, "The Sources for a Study of the Chaldean Mass," *Worship* 51 (1977): 528.

Qaṭrāyâ produced basically the same commentary in question-and-answer form, though he occasionally offers his own interpretations.[35] The most detailed commentary describes the liturgy of a bishop probably in a city-church because of the elaborate ceremony. The author is not identified and so is known conventionally as the *anonymous commentary*.[36] The *terminus a quo* of this commentary is 780, but its *terminus ad quem* is uncertain. It is generally dated to the ninth century or tenth century.[37]

Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries

The tenth to thirteenth centuries mark the end of effervescent composition and the filling out of the monastic offices. Patriarch Elias III (d. 1190), also known as Abu Ḥalim, composed a number of prayers collected in the eponymous liturgical book *Abu Ḥalim*. George Wardâ crafted poetic refrains, compiled into the eponymous liturgical book, the *wardâ* (literally, "the rose") along with similar composition by other contemporaries. It dates from the thirteenth century.[38] The *gazâ* ("treasure") also dates from the thirteenth century and fills

35. R. H. Connolly, ed. *Anonymi auctoris Expositio officiorum Ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta accedit Abrahae Bar Lipheh interpretatio officiorum*, CSCO 72, Scriptores Syri 29 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1913).

36. *Anonymi auctoris Expositio officiorum Ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta*, ed. R. H. Connolly, CSCO 64 (part I)/72 (part II) (Rome and Paris, 1913–1915).

37. See Macomber, "Sources," 529. Connolly, whom Jammo follows, ascribes it to the ninth century. The date 780 is a *terminus a quo* because the commentary mentions the final Lord's Prayer added by Timothy I who was elected in 780. Information on the monastic liturgical life of the period at the great monastery of Bêt ʿābê can be found in the *Historia Monastica* of Thomas of Margâ known as the *Book of the Governors*, ed. E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1893). The region of Margâ is east of Mosul.

38. See Baumstark, 304–306.

out what is missing in the *ḥûdrâ* for night vigils and later includes other feasts of the Lord not observed on Sunday and some commemorations of the saints.

Fifteenth to Twentieth Centuries

After this period of composition and codification of liturgical texts, the East Syrian liturgy undergoes further developments as it is influenced by schism, Latinization, and western missionary influence. Two rival patriarchates foster two distinct styles of performance. Following the Mongol invasion in the fourteenth century, the patriarchate of the Church of the East was centered in the monastery of Raban Hormizd in Northern Iraq, near Alqosh.[39] This patriarchate was hereditary, with the office of the patriarch passing in most instances from the father to a nephew. This monastery also came to develop more elaborate ritual prescriptions. In the mid-sixteenth century the corruption of the hereditary patriarchate lead to a schism that divided the Church of the East. A party of bishops elected John Simon Sulaqâ, a monk from the Hormizd monastery, as patriarch. At the suggestion of the Franciscan missionaries in the area, John Sulaqâ went to Rome to make a declaration of Catholic faith. In 1553 he was consecrated a Catholic bishop in order to bolster his authority as patriarch by union with Rome.[40] This uniate line continued with varying degrees of connection to Rome, but eventually disconnected itself from Rome as early as 1600. The Sulaqâ line continued as nonuniate to the present but returned to hereditary succession.

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39. The development of the church structures and the resulting liturgical reforms is difficult to trace. For a critical evaluation of the lists of patriarchs, see Heleen H. L. Murre-Van den Berg, "The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 2, no. 2 (1999).

40. This move failed to sway all of the Church of the East. Moreover, John was later assassinated by the Turks.

However, with the election in 1967 of the most recent patriarch, Mar Denḥâ IV, it abandoned the hereditary succession.[41] In the interim, a new uniate line under the influence of Capuchin missionaries arose. In 1672, the bishop of Diyarbakir (Amida) became Catholic and was later recognized as Patriarch Joseph I.[42] This uniate line would continue and eventually relocated as the patriarchate of "Babylon." Mar Raphael Bidawid has been patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church since 1989.

These back-and-forth shifts to unity with Rome impacted the liturgical life of the Church of the East. First, the uniates simplified the ritual of their liturgy, while the original patriarchate lines kept a more elaborate ritual actions known as the Alqosh usage. The liturgical texts of the two churches, though, remained the same, apart from some minor variants.[43] Nevertheless, the usage of Alqosh eventually supplanted the simplified liturgy of the first uniate patriarchate.[44] The uniate liturgy underwent further Latinizations when the uniate patriarch was established in Diyarbakir. Patriarch Joseph I's successor also introduced several elements from the Maronite liturgy.[45]

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41. The original patriarchal family line of the Hormizd patriarchate, the Abunâ line, eventually died out in 1838. It remained centered in Alqosh, near Mosul.

42. Macomber, "Chaldean Mass," 116. The rival patriarch entered open schism with Rome after this turn of events.

43. See Macomber, "Chaldean Mass," 114.

44. Macomber suggests it was because the copiest at Alqosh had such a beautiful style that those liturgical books were most desirable. See "Chaldean Mass," 116.

45. Macomber suggests that the seminarians from the East lodged at the Maronite college in Rome. The Latinisms include a *Confiteor*, a form of the *Agnus Dei*, feasts from the Roman calendar for saints and Mary, and a last Gospel. The Maronite elements are an offertory prayer; a prayer of inclination to Mary in the anaphora, which got an institution narrative; a hymn of Jacob of Sarug at the fraction; and the "farewell to the altar" at the end of the liturgy. See Macomber 116–117.

In the following two centuries, the "Chaldean" Catholic patriarchate of Diyarbakir and the nonuniate patriarchate of Alqosh did attempt liturgical unification, but their rivalry impeded its success. With Abdishoᶜ V (1894–1899) a serious reform began, but the liturgy he submitted drew opposition from Diyarbakir because it set out the usage of Alqosh. "Only under the next patriarch Emmanual II Thomas (1900–1947) was a compromise reached that preserved one 'Latinism' and one 'Maronitism' from the rite of Diyarbakir, but remained substantially faithful to the rite of Alqoš."[46] In addition to the internal, confessional rivalry, the Church of the East as a whole lived a precarious existence into the twentieth century, poised at the borders of the Ottomans, Kurds, and Iraqis.[47]

A major development for the standardization of the liturgy came with the onslaught of missionaries in the eighteenth through early twentieth century. Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Roman Catholics, and Russian Orthodox took great interest in the Church of the East, building schools, welfare centers, and hospitals as well as trying to reclaim the "Nestorians." The Lazarist and Anglican missionaries to the East also imported a few westernisms in the Alqosh liturgy. However, it was the efforts of these missionaries that lead to the printing and publishing of the East Syrian liturgical texts. For the first time in its

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46. Macomber, "Chaldean Mass," 118. The Latinism is the *Agnus Dei* and the Maronitism is the offertory prayer. Macomber notes that the Maronite farewell to the altar continued in devotional practice. As for the institution narrative, see ibid., 118–119. There is a certain irony with regard to the *Agnus Dei*, in that Pope Sergius, who introduced it into the Roman Liturgy in the eighth century, borrowed it from the Syriac Church's repertoire.

47. See Aziz S. Atiya, A *History of Eastern Christianity* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968), 277–288. Atiya is not impartial in his account: He refers to the history of the "Nestorians" as "pathetic" and speaks of the Christians who took refuge in the mountains as "primitive" like their Kurdish neighbors.

history, major manuscripts gave way to printed and bound books patterned after the Western breviary and missal.[48]

Today, there are the nine editions of the missal that, despite the standardization of the printing press, still vary one from the other.[49] Among the missals, the edition of J. Kelaytâ is considered to be the most representative of the manuscript missal traditions.[50] With regard to the *ḥûdrâ*, the Chaldean (Catholic) version reflects the desire of the editors to avoid

48. See the bibliography of known manuscripts and editions in Yousif, *Classified Bibliography*, 31–35 (eucharist), 81–88 (hours). See the summary in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1931), s.v. "Nestorienne (L'Église) Textes Liturgiques," by E. Tisserant. The titles of these books belie the principle behind their composition. The western *missale plenum* compiled and arranged what was needed for the celebration of the Mass throughout the year from a number of originally separate books: the sacramentary, the lectionary, the *ordo*, the antiphonary, etc. Similarly, the western *breviary* compiled and abridged the texts needed to celebrate the office through the course of the year. Hence the editors of the East Syrian books compiled and abridged material from a number of books to create a "missal" and "breviary." Thus, the so-called breviary is a compilation of the *ḥûdrâ*, the *gazâ*, the psalter, the *qalê* ("chants"), the *daqdam wadbātar* (book of the hymn or psalm that comes before and after the fixed vesperal psalmody) the *wardâ*, the *abû halim*, and the *kashkul*. The missal contains for the most part the ordinary for the eucharistic liturgy, but also elements from the ritual.

49. See C. Moussess, "Les huit éditions du missel chaldéen," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 1 (1951): 209–220. To Moussess's listing must be added the edition of Kelaytâ below.

50. J. Kelaytâ, *The Liturgy of the Church of the East* (Mosul, 1928). This 'missal' (really a *taksâ*) contains the ordinary of the eucharistic liturgy and several other rites. The propers are found in the *ḥûdrâ* or its supplement. This edition was reissued in 1959 by Archbishop Darmo. It was published again in 1971 by the Chaldeans who cleared away remaining Latinisms and set Alqosh rubrics as part of liturgical renewal inspired by Vatican II.

expressions that could be construed as "Nestorian."[51] The Church of the East *ḥûdrâ* has most recently been edited and published by T. Darmo.[52]

Thus, the liturgical texts and actions of the East Syrian liturgy are the result of a centuries-long process of redaction and compilation. While the tradition ascribes authorial voice to certain texts most certainly to bolster their authority and explain their introduction to celebration, tracing the history of the liturgy shows that in particular the euchology of the East Syrian church juxtaposes texts of different origins, eras, and genres. Even the compilation of the printed liturgical books of recent effort have had to make deliberate selection and rejection of the manuscript traditions.

Having traced the story of the redaction and compilation of liturgical texts and rubrics, I will now examine the liturgies first of the Pasch and then of Epiphany for the appearance of the descent motif. The literary tradition itself suggests that both the Pasch and Epiphany are significant feasts that take up the descent motif as a constitutive element. In this examination of the liturgical celebrations of the Pasch and Epiphany, I will proceed through the liturgical cursus of the feast, which marks the evening, nighttime, and morning

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51. P. Bedjan and J. Khayyath, ed. *Breviarium iuxta Ritum Syrorum Orientalium id est Chaldaeorum*, 3 vols. Paris: 1886–1887, reprinted Rome: Congregation for Oriental Churches, 1938. A good example of the theological editing is shown in Sebastian Brock, "Christ 'The Hostage': A Theme in the East Syriac Liturgical Tradition and its Origins," *Logos: Festschrift für Luise Abramowski zum 8. Juli 1993*, ed. Hans Christof Brennecke et al. (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 67 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 472–485. For the history of this breviary, see J. M. Vosté, "Paul Bedjan, lazariste persan," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 11 (1945): 45–102.

52. T. Darmo, ed. *Ktābâ dqdām wdbātar wdḥûdrâ wdkashkôl wdgazâ wqālâ dʿûdrānê ʿam ktâbâ dmazmôrê*, 3 vols. (Trichur: Mar Narsai Press, 1960–1961). I will use this edition of Darmo as the basic liturgical text in my study, referring to Bedjan only if a major variation appears.

with liturgical assemblies. The order of each of the main liturgies will be outlined in a table. Then, I will examine each of these liturgies according to the following genres of liturgical prayer: psalmody, lections, proper hymnody, euchology, and pertinent ritual actions.[53] I will attend to the following questions: how does the liturgy negotiate the descent motif? How does the use of psalmody, hymnody, and ritual action mediate the descent motif? These feasts also involve the celebration of eucharist and baptism. I will then examine these liturgies with an eye to discerning the significance of the descent motif.

THE EAST SYRIAN PASCHAL CELEBRATION

The East Syrian yearly celebration of the Pasch still bears the traces of Quartodeciman celebration noted in chapter 3. The core of the three-day paschal observance is two parallel vigils.[54] The three days are reckoned Friday-Saturday-Sunday, from sunset to sunset. Thus, on Thursday evening, the celebration begins with vespers and eucharist focused

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53. Throughout these sections the pertinent volume and page numbers from Darmo will be given parenthetically. The page numbers, which appear in Syriac, are rendered in Arabic numerals. These should not be confused with the Arabic numbers of the ordinary of Darmo's edition, which will be indicated by means of an accompanying asterisk where necessary. For a discussion of ritual action in terms of genre, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford, University Press, 1997), 93–137.

54. See Mateos, *Lelya-Ṣapra*, 219–232; Antony George Kollamparampil, "Week of the Victorious Paschal Lamb: From Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday in the East Syrian Liturgy," in *Hebdomadae sanctae celebratio, conspectus historicus comparativus: The Celebration of Holy Week in Ancient Jerusalem and its Development in the Rites of East and West*, ed. A. G. Kollamparampil (Rome: CLV, 1997), 135–163. The detailed studies are A. G. Kollamparampil, *The Life-Giving Paschal Lamb: Great Week Celebrations in the East Syrian Liturgy*, Catholic Theological Studies of India 2 (Changanacherry, India: HIRS Publications, 1997); Varghese Pathikulangara, *Qyamtâ whayê whûdātâ: Resurrection, Life and Renewal. A Theological Study of the Liturgical Celebrations of the Great Saturday and the Sunday of the Resurrection in the Chaldeo-Indian Church* (Bangalore-Kottayam: Dhramaram Publications, 1982).

on the Last Supper, opening "Friday of the Passion and the Mysteries of the Peṣḥâ." After the faithful have taken a light meal they spend the night in vigil, the first vigil known as the "Pasch of the Crucifixion." This type of all-night vigil has a very archaic structure and character.[55] It concludes with morning prayer *(ṣaprâ)* and an office for those preparing for baptism.[56] The particular aspects of the Pasch highlighted for celebration are the washing of the feet, the eucharist, and passion of Jesus through his arrest and trial. A commemoration of the crucifixion concludes the observance of Friday of the passion with the office of *ʿedanâ.*[57]

The liturgical celebration of Great Saturday begins with vespers *(ramshâ)* Friday evening that includes a procession with the cross followed by a night office, concluded with

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55. See Juan Mateos, "Les différents espèces de vigiles dans le rite chaldéen," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 27 (1961): 58. Though there have been a few subsequent additions, the basic structure is parallel to Egeria's description of the Jerusalem cathedral vigil for Sunday (on this see Mateos, "La vigile cathédrale chez Egérie," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 27 (1961): 281–312. See also Gabriele Winkler, "Das Offizium am Ende des 4. Jahrhunderts und das heutige chaldäische Offizium, ihre strukturellen Zusammenhänge," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 19 (1970): 289–311, who develops Mateos's observations. This type of vigil corresponds to the Byzantine ἀγρυπνία or παννυχίς. However, the East Syrian all-night vigil links compline and the night office, while the Byzantine links vespers with matins. The final section of the East Syrian vigil office, the *qalê dshahrâ*, is for all practical purposes identical in structure to Egeria's, and today it also serves as a liturgical "linking unit" between the two conjoined offices.

56. On this see A. G. Kollamparampil, "«Hastening to Reach the Glorious Port of Baptism»: Reflections on the Baptismal Office during the East Syrian Holy Week Celebrations," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 109 (1995): 310–330. This is the final observance of the preparatory office that is included in daily prayer for the five days from Monday after Hosanna Sunday (Palm-Passion Sunday in the Roman Rite) through this evening.

57. Roughly corresponding to *sext* of the Roman Rite. The East Syrian Church has maintained three principal daily offices of a marked cathedral character: ܪܡܫܐ *(ramshâ* [vespers]), ܠܠܝܐ *(lelyâ* [night office]), and ܨܦܪܐ *(ṣaprâ* [morning office]), to which is added on Sundays and feasts a night vigil ܫܗܪܐ *(shahrâ)* and often *sûbaʿâ* (compline). In seasons of fast, the monastic offices of *terce*, *sext*, and *none*, are often included. See Juan Mateos, "L'office divine chez les chaldéens," in *La prière des heures*, ed. Msgr. Cassien and B. Botte, Lex Orandi 35 (Paris: 1963): 235–281.

morning prayer (*ṣaprâ*). The Great Sunday of the Resurrection begins with an expanded *ramshâ* leading to the second "vigil of the resurrection" that includes a rite of washing the altar, the rite of baptism, the rite of pardon, and the paschal eucharist, and night vigil (*qālâ dshahrâ*) and *ṣaprâ*. Great Sunday of the Resurrection includes the rite of paschal peace, procession, and the eucharist. It is to these liturgical celebrations of Great Saturday and Great Sunday, from *ramshâ* to the Sunday eucharist that I turn.[58]

Great Saturday

Ramshâ (Evening Prayer)

Table 4.0
The Order of *Ramshâ* of Great Saturday

- Opening Prayers
- Psalmody (Pss 22–30)
- Anthem of Incense
- *Lakûmārâ* Hymn

- Alleluia Psalm (Shûrāyâ and Anthem *daqdām*): Pss 69, 20–28
- Fixed Vesperal Psalmody: Ps 140–141, 118:105–112, 116
- Alleluia Psalm (Shûrāyâ and the Anthem *dbātar*): Ps 139

- Scriptural Readings
  - Isaiah 52:13–53:12
  - Daniel 9:20-27
  - Psalm 34:14–16
  - Galatians 2:17–3:14
  - *Zûmārâ*: Ps 22:16c–18a
  - Gospel
- Litanic Prayers (*Karôzûtâ*)

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58. For a detailed, historical-critical examination of the structure and peculiarities of the offices in general, see Juan Mateos, *Lelya-Ṣapra*, and Sylvester Pudichery, *Ramsa: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Chaldean Vespers* (Pachalam, Dharmaram: De Paul Press, 1972). For an overview, see also R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and its Meaning for Today* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1986), 225–237.

- *Trisagion*
- Prayer of Inclination

- Stational Procession
  Royal Anthem
  Alleluia Psalm *(Shûrāyâ)*: Psalm 22:16c–19a
- Lord's Prayer
- Final Prayers

PSALMODY. The psalmody for Sundays and feasts of the Lord in the East Syrian offices is fixed, not a *psalmodia currens* that is characteristic of monastic offices. Moreover, the East Syrian offices, in contrast to the West Syrian and Byzantine rites, has preserved the psalmody itself that, for the most part, is not subsumed to the intercalation of liturgical poetry. The initial psalmody is a remnant from the office of *none*.[59]

In the office of *ramshâ* for Great Saturday, the designated psalmody includes the following verses that are significant: Psalms 24, 141:7; 107:16, 116:3, and 139:8. In all these instances the allusions to Sheol and the descent motif take on heightened import, given the liturgical frame of Great Saturday and the repeated mention of the descent in the euchology. Moreover they fill out the semantic range of the allusions in the euchology. Thus, Psalm 24, with its dialogue, "Gates raise your heads . . . let the king of glory enter" (Ps 24:9) is juxtaposed with reports of the shattering or breaking down of the gates of Sheol (Ps 107:17 and Ps 115 [116]:3). Psalm 138 (139) affirms God's omnipresence, even in Sheol (v. 8). As analyzed in chapter 2, the image of Sheol in hymnic discourse is very pronounced and is

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59. See Taft, 234–235. *Ramshâ* formerly began with the opening of the sanctuary veil, the lighting of lamps, incensation and the anthem of incense based on Psalm 140, and the *lakûmārâ* hymn.

reinforced by personification and graphic struggle imagery. In the frame of the paschal liturgies these allusions would be particularly "loud" to the assembly, as the euchology and hymnody serve to augment its impact.

LECTIONS. A liturgy of the word is not an ordinary part of *ramshâ*. The addition of a liturgy of the word is a particularity of this paschal celebration. The first reading, Isaiah 52:13–53:12 recounts the so-called suffering servant's travail. The second reading, Daniel 9:21–27 contributes an eschatological dimension as it describes the succession of weeks that lead to the inbreak of the definitive reign of God.

The third reading, Galatians 2:17–3:14, draws out a particular aspect of the descent motif. At the same time, the paschal frame and the previous realizations of the descent motif inform its reception. The reading describes the blessing of Abraham and the blessing of the Gentiles. It explains that all in faith are children of Abraham, and that through Christ's saving work all people have the blessing of faith. Here the universality of God's redemptive action, stretching from Abraham and extending to the Gentiles, recalls the universality of redemption that the descent motif emphasizes—all the righteous ancestors, indeed all the dead, have been illumined and raised by Christ.

The gospel reading is a catena of verses from Luke, Matthew, and John.[60] In its weaving of the verses, it avoids any consideration of the temporal conundrum that patristic writers grappled with, namely the report that the graves opened at Christ's death yet he

60. Lk 22:63–23:13; Mt 27:3–11, 19-20; Lk 23:13–24; Mt 27:24–26; Lk 23:24–45a; Mt 27:51–55; Jn 19:23-41; Mt 27:60 ܘܐܙܠ . . . ܟܕ ܘܥܓܠܗ ܟܐܦܐ; Lk 23:54–56. See *Ḥûdrâ* 2:510.

remained in Sheol three days. Here the liturgy announces that Christ dies, the graves open, and dead come out praising.

EUCHOLOGY. The euchology of *ramshâ* consists of prayers of several different genres, that punctuate each major section of the office. These include the *kārôzwātâ*, introductory and concluding prayers, the *slawātâ*, and the *ʿûdrānê*.[61] The descent motif appears in the *kārôzûtâ*. The deacon invokes Christ through a series of tropes including to explicit reference to his descent:

> Living One *(ḥayâ)* who descended to the place of the dead and preached good hope to the souls *(lnapshātâ)* who were shut up in Sheol, [have mercy on us]. . . .
>
> He who by his death rent the graves and vivified the dead to the reproof of his crucifiers, [have mercy on us]. (2:511)

The major elements of the descent tradition are selected and juxtaposed: preaching, illumination, vivification, destruction. It also links these actions as a witness to the unbelievers—the crucifiers. The invocation links anamnesis and epiclesis, a feature of the earliest Syriac euchology.

HYMNODY. The hymnody of the office deploys the descent motif to great extent. The *ʿônîtâ*[62] known as the "royal anthem" or *ʿônîtâ dbās ālîqê* introduces a major hymnic unit in the

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61. The term ܨܠܘܬܐ (*ṣlôtâ* [pl. *ṣlawata*]) could be rendered "prayer." However, the typical structure and content of western and Byzantine prayers should not be read into this genre. In the liturgical books, the term *ṣlôtâ* is used for orations that are simple petitions, others that link an invocation to a petition, but moreso others that are simply pure praise or submission to God's glory or adoration of the glory of God. The ܥܘܕܪܢܐ (*ʿudrānâ* ["help"]) is an oration, usually at the end of a liturgy, that petitions for God's aid. The term ܟܪܘܙܘܬܐ (*kārôzûtâ* ["proclamation," "preaching," "heralding"]) is used to designate a litanic or bidding prayer lead by the deacon as well as a type of diaconal proclamation in the course of the liturgy.

62. An ܥܘܢܝܬܐ (*ʿônîtâ*) in the liturgical books most usually refers to a responsorial hymn or anthem. The term can also be used as well as for a "refrain" or what is called the *troparion* in the Byzantine liturgy. For further consideration of the various musical elements, see Adolf Rücker, "Die

office. It is ordinarily accompanied by a procession from the *bêmâ* to the sanctuary.[63] The choir chants:

> When you had been suspended on the cross, Messiah, creation saw you naked and quaked . . . With great amazement the sleepers in the tombs wondered and stood up, mounting up glory for your great power, O Lord. (2:511)

This anthem introduces a lengthy *ʿônîtâ* that comes from the *wardâ*, entitled *a'lam*. All are seated while two choirs alternate the strophes. Because of its centrality I translate here in full:

> *And then the assembly sits down and they say this* ʿônîtâ *from the* Wardâ.
> To eternity. *To [the tune]* 'êw lāk ʿûbâ.
>
> At the suffering of our Lord there was suffering, and wonder seized the watchers and people. The dead who were buried arose, and from their graves they went out singing, "Glory to the Son who was brought down and on our account was hanged on the wood. He called out with his living voice and made earth and heaven shake."
>
> Awake, First Adam, and see the Only Son *(brâ iḥîdāyâ)*, suffering like a sinner at the hand of the Jewish People.
> Awake and stand up, wronged Abel, slain by an unjust brother, and see the redeemer of the world who dies for the life of the world.
> Awake and stand up, innocent Noah, he who was a substitute for the world, and see the Son of the exalted One who hangs on the wood today.
> Awake and stand up, sons of blessing, Shem and Japheth, full of modesty, who hid the nakedness of their father who fell asleep, come and see the luminous sun and the beautiful lamp of the moon, who behold are putting on sorrowful darkness, lest their despised Lord be seen.
> Awake priest Melkizedek, who did not offer flesh on the altar, come and see today the Son who gave his mystical symbols in bread and wine.
> Awake Abraham, and see the Son who appeared to you in revelation, hung today on the wood like that mystical symbol revealed to you.
> Awake blessed Isaac, redeemed through the lamb from the tree, see that true mystical symbol that was perfected by your Lord today
> Awake Jacob Israel, who saw the ladder on Bethel, which the watchers were ascending for the service of Emmanuel.
> Awake righteous Joseph, who received misery from his brothers, and see Jesus the redeemer, who received spittle from his children.

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wechselnden Gesangstücke der ostsyrischen Messe," *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 1 (1922): 61–86.

63. See the discussion in Pathipulangara, 78.

Awake eminent Job, and see that the redeemer is revealed, the one who is revealed to you far off, and you said about him, "He is seen in the depth."
Awake Moses, chief prophet, and see the Lord of the prophets, he who suffers by the children of the prophets as the prophets prophesied.
Awake and stand up Aaron, priest, and see your corrupted seed that instead of a grain of wheat is a tare in your field today.
Awake mighty Joshua, who restrained the sun and the moon, see that they put on mournful darkness today at the death of the Son.
Awake Jephthah (Naptaḥ), who made a sacrifice of his only daughter (*lbarteh îḥîdāyatâ*), see the Son who on Golgotha offered himself as sacrifice.
Awake Samuel, the high priest, look and see the Lord of priests, whom the priests bring like a sinner and evil-doer to crucifixion.
Awake David the singer, and come up out of your tomb today, take cither and harp, proclaim and say in a psalm, "The People deprived of mercy, mercilessly nailed the hands of the Son who came from above in order to redeem the People and the nations. They divided his garments among them and for his clothing they put their lots, and like dogs they all surrounded the Lion but he did not speak with them."
Awake Solomon, sea of wisdom, stand up from the dust and see the Lord of wisdom, at whom folly scoffs.
Awake and stand up from the place of the dead, prophet who made two dead ones live [Elijah], and see the clamor among the dead because the Son of the Life is put in the place of dead.
Awake glorious Isaiah, look and see the king Messiah, who is being lead to the killing as a sacrifice and his mouth is not opened.
Awake Hosea, who took adulterous women as his wives, and behold, see your people who were forsaken by your Lord and attempted his killing.
Awake blessed Joel and see the darkness, the obscurity, the blood and the smoke of the clouds, that reigned over the world today.
Awake and stand up, prophet Amos, and see the son of *'ātêôs*, against whom the crowd has gathered today and whom they crucified at the order of Pilate.
Awake prophet Obediah, and see the deliverance that the Lord did for the human race on the mountain of Jerusalem.
Awake Jonah, who three days was in the likeness of a dead one and show Jewry (*layhûdāyûtâ*) the third-day resurrection.
Awake Micah, and see the shepherd who came to convert the erring, but the Jewish people stood up against him and crucified him as a sinner.
Awake and stand up Nahum, look and see the living Son who announced peace to the rejected and those thought rejected.
Awake and stand up, chosen Habakkuk, and see the temple of pardon, that behold it is rent by the passion of the Lord and the Holy Spirit is removed from it.
Awake and stand up O blessed one who made a judgment with the Lord and see the wonder today the Judge under trial.
Awake Zephaniah, see the Church that in the crucifixion was redeemed, and the farthest became the nearest, and the synagogue has been dispersed.
Awake blessed Haggai, the one who incited the building, and see the veil of the temple of pardoning is rent today

Awake Zachariah, and see the thirty [pieces of silver], the price of our Lord that they fixed, for they are given to the potter and behold they buy a field with them.

Awake chosen Malachai, and put to shame the corrupt People, for they crucified the Only Begotten One *(îḥîdāyâ)* and say that they are clean.

Awake priest Jeremiah, who was thrown into a pit of clay, and see your Lord today whose tomb was for him a bridal chamber.

Awake prophet, son of Buzi [Ezekiel], and come from Babylon, look and see, behold the one who appeared to you on the clouds in the flesh is hanged on the wood.

Awake prophet Daniel, look and see Emmanuel, the one about whom Gabriel told you. He suffers at the hands of the children of Israel.

Awake blessed Zachariah, and his blessed son the Baptist, and see that behold today your Lord is made a sacrifice and an offering

Awake and stand up fathers who died unto the hope *(ʿal sabrâ)* of the resurrection and see on the summit of Golgotha that Lord of all creation.

Awake dead ones of old, and come out of your deep graves and see among the accusers one who victorious falsely accused.

Awake dead ones nearby and within Jerusalem, if the farthest are suspected perhaps the nearest will be believed.

Awake and stand up all you dead, look and see the Living Dead that, behold, lead the Lord of both living and dead within the place of the dead.

Awake and stand up from your graves and accuse your sons, brothers, and friends who crucified their Lord and your Lord.

Awake dead ones from eternity *(men ʿālam)* and see the Son who is from eternity, in his love he was formed as you and in whom all the scripture is fulfilled.

Awake dead ones who are in sin, and see the Son who did not know sin who dies with sinners to kill death and sin.

Awake dead ones and see the wonder on the cross of the first born *(bûkrâ)* Son, who through his murder rent the earth and through his death undid death.

Woe to the ungrateful People, for the sun with the moon darkened and their blind heart did not the things that came to be in truth.

Woe to the Jewish People who became strangers to the Lord and to whom there is not priest or prophet, neither king nor seer.

Woe to Jewry *(layhûdāyûtâ)* who became to its Lord crucifiers, but blessed is the elect church that has become an adorer to its Lord.

Make victorious the conquering one, for your mercies brought him down and by your will his servants judged him . . . the one whom your mercy brought into being.

Blessed be your death and glorious be your resurrection! Pardon and have mercy through your grace on your servants who have confessed your divinity, be to us in your power an aid and pour forth your mercies in all time upon the gatherings that are in the churches that confess you who rose in truth and to you with your Father be glory and adoration and to the Holy Spirit for eternity. (2:512–515)

The genre of this prayer is characteristic of Syriac liturgy.[64] In most instances this litanic genre is used for intercession or petition. Typical formulations follow the pattern, "Hear us, Lord, as you heard . . ." or "As you helped so-and-so, help us," or in this case, "Awake so-and-so, who did such-and-such, and see the Pasch of Christ." This genre also recalls the exemplary sequence genre considered under Aphrahat's work, where recital of epiphanies or acts of God is the main feature.

The anthem here parallels the two *madrāshê* that are prescribed for *lelyâ* of the Friday of the Passion Vigil, which merit brief consideration because of this parallel. The first *madrāshâ* in the first *mawtbâ* has the following refrain:

> Awake, vigilant ones, sing glory with your voices for the Lion's whelp is prisoner. Who could go to sleep? (2:490)

In the context of an all-night vigil, the repetition of a refrain, "Who could go to sleep?" might obviously serve as a call to stay awake. It identifies the assembly with the greater company of watchers. The strophe also suggests that the assembly enters into the temporal succession of the passion, noting Christ's arrest and then moving to the crucifixion itself. The rest of the verses of this *madrāshê* meditates on the events of the passion. The second *madrāshâ* in the second *mawtbâ* extends the refrain's call to vigilance. The refrain casts Jesus as the speaker:

> Awake, just ones, and see the suffering that I endured for your redemption, wake up! (2:492)

And the verses enumerate prophecies about the passion, for example:

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64. Among German scholars it is known as a *Paradigmengebet*. On the genre, see Anton Baumstark, "Paradigmengebete ostsyrischer Kirchendichtung," *Oriens Christianus* 10 (1920): 1–32. Baumstark also examines the *commendatio animae* of the Roman ritual for dying. The antitheses recall the Roman *Improperia* of the Liturgy of the Lord's Passion and Death.

> Awake, Abraham, exult and be glad rejoice, for the mystical symbol that you had depicted in the death of Isaac has been perfected; wake up! . . .
>
> Awake, son of Matay [Jonah], go out of the fish and see how the mystical symbol that you depicted in the abyss has been perfected; wake up! (2:492)

In the anthem *ʿālam* from the *Wardâ* sung on Great Saturday the narrative strategy shifts. The dead who come out of the grave, a synonym for Sheol, are the patriarchs whose song of glory attests to the power of Christ's death. The elements of the descent motif are incorporated as part of the cosmic testimony: appearance in the deep, light in the darkness, proclamation to those thought rejected, the destruction of the graves. The anthem connects the gathered liturgical assembly with the great company of the righteous whom it summons. It links the ecclesial related to the eschatological. While most realizations of the descent motif work to speak of the salvation of the ancestors before the time of Jesus, the liturgy makes a further move. It connects the liturgical assembly to the great communion of all who have died before them, reaching back even to the figures of the OT. They are summoned to be present, testifying to the communion of the saints.

An examination of the structure of the Great Saturday hymn reveals several compositional strategies. First is chronological ordering of the righteous from Adam to John the Baptist, finishing out with more general invocations of the dead first from the Jerusalem environs to all the dead, including the sinners. Here the liturgical anthem connects the liberation of the dead to the descent of Christ and to the whole scope of humankind's death. The hope of the resurrection of all humankind has been realized in the death and descent of the dead Christ. Second, the controlling narrative seems to be Matthew 27:50–54. The loud cry of Jesus is identified as a living voice that rends earth and heaven and opens the graves.

The dead come out to testify to the passion and death. This testimony ellicits a cry of faith from the centurion, as reported by the Gospels. Third, the anthem uses antithesis and parallelism to control the relations between the ancestor invoked and the Pasch. The invocation of Jeremiah is an example of the antithesis: Jeremiah was cast into a pit, while the Lord was entombed in a grave become bridal chamber. The parallelism is especially evident in the invocation of Isaac: He was spared death by a lamb and now all humanity is spared through Christ's death on the tree. Fourth the anthem emphasizes the sacrificial character of Christ's death. Images of sacrifice dominate the invocation of Melkizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Isaiah, and Zachariah. The death of Christ is invested with propitiatory valence.

What is most pronounced in this prayer is its invective against the Jews. While the opening refrain images the dead ones singing glory to God, in effect the ancestors are called upon to chastise their progeny. The children of Israel turn away, spitting at Christ. The children of the prophets slay the innocent one. The people Jesus came to redeem hang him on a tree. In the final strophes of the prayer the liturgical assembly raises a series of curses to the Jews. They are blind, strangers, and ungrateful. The Church, however, is blessed and rejoices now that the Jewish people have crucified the Lord. Here, a layer of the sedimentation of imagery in the descent motif has been pulled forward. In the Nisibene Hymns of Ephraem and the anonymous paschal homilies, the descent to Sheol provides a vehicle for invective against the Jews. In the case of Ephraem, the descent motif provides an occasion for the personified Sheol and Death to point out that the Jews are guilty of numerous murders, including the execution of Jesus. For the anonymous *sôgîtâ* the destruction of Sheol speaks of the reproach of the Jews.

A final element of hymnody is a versicle *(petgāmâ)* intercalated with the *lākûmārâ*:[65]

The Son of Freedom is among the dead and like the slain who lie in the tombs. (2:510)

The versicle draws out the identification of Jesus as the "quickener of bodies" by emphasizing his presence in Sheol among the dead.

RITUAL ACTIONS. The first ritual action that the commentaries speak about is the very gathering of the assembly in the night. The silence and dark of the night is imaged as a mirror of the descent to the shadows of Sheol.[66] In the liturgical books, the central ritual action of *ramshâ* is a procession focused on the cross. The *ḥûdrâ* prescribes the following:

> And when the Gospel is finished, they bend the cross to the bishop, and he removes the tunic *(kûtînâ)* from it and covers it with a neat shroud and entrusts it to the priest, and he carries it with the Gospel Book to the sanctuary and puts it on the altar. (2:510–511)

The rubrics here are ambiguous.[67] The tunic is the vestment common to all the ministers. The shroud suggests preparation for burial, but the procession's route is not specified. The royal anthem is sung, which itself is ordinarily accompanied by a procession to the cross on the altar. However, a rubric that follows seems to indicate that the procession itself has gone outside to the portico.[68] The procession returns as the royal anthem is repeated a second time.

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65. The term ܦܬܓܡܐ *(petgāmâ)* applies to a versicle or a line of poetry or Scripture that is added to an otherwise fixed liturgical element. In this case the fixed element is the "You, O Lord" hymn (see below).

66. Chapter 18 of the first tract of the anonymous commentary images the ecclesial gathering in terms of the rest and expectation of the dead in Sheol. See *Anonymi auctoris Expositio*, ed. R. Connolly, CSCO 64 (Paris and Leipzig: Carolus Poussielgue and Harrassowitz, 1911), 82–84.

67. Pathipulangara, 72, fills in the gaps by noting the gestures that have been handed on by local traditions.

68. Kollamparampil, 157, and Pathipulangara, 78–82, suggest that the procession with the cross is turned into a burial procession, with the movement parallel that of the funeral cortege for the burial of a presbyter.

The presider goes to the altar, removes the shroud, and washes the cross with a little water.[69] The presider incenses the cross, then processes to the nave, where the assembly and ministers kiss the cross. After reverencing the cross, they sip bitter water, made from herbs and some of the water used to "wash" the cross. When the veneration is ended, the presider processes the cross first to the altar, then to the north, south and west of the church building. He returns to the altar, then covers the cross with the shroud and places it under or behind the altar. In sum, the cross is "buried" in the sepulcher/altar.[70] The burial of the cross is a mimetic ritual that connects to the descent motif through the link between the grave/tomb and Sheol. The royal anthem or at least its first stanza is sung thrice, then the anthem "Awake" is sung by the alternating choirs.

Lelyâ and Ṣaprâ (Night Vigil and Morning Office)

Table 4.1
The Order of Great Saturday *Lelyâ* and *Ṣaprâ*

Lelyâ

- Opening Prayers

- First *Mawtbâ*
  - Psalms 82–101
  - "Glory to you" Psalm: Ps 70

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69. This "washing of the cross," a ritual mimesis of embalming or washing a body before burial, is found in the Syrian and Coptic tradition. It is picked up in Hagiopolite usage as witnessed by the Georgian lectionary, which witnesses to liturgy in Jerusalem from the fifth to eighth centuries. It is not part of adoration of the cross, but the later mimetic rites of burial.

70. See A. Rücker, "Die «*adoratio crucis*» am Karfreitag in den orientalischen Riten," in *Miscellanea liturgica in honorem L. Cuniberti Mohlberg*, Biblioteca Ephemerides Liturgicae 22 (Rome: Edizioni liturgiche, 1948), 1:379–406, esp. 403–406. On the bitter water, see Dominique Dahane, "La Passion dans la Liturgie Syrienne Orientale," *L'Orient Syrien* 2 (1957): 185.

The Praise *(Teshbôḥtâ)*
Karôzûtâ
Madrāshâ

- Second *Mawtbâ*
  Psalms 112–140
  Anthem of the Nocturn
  Canon
  The Praise *(Teshbôḥtâ)*
  Karôzûtâ
  Madrāshâ

- Conclusion

The *Qālâ dshahrâ*

- Hûlālâ
  Exodus 15:1–21
  Isaiah 42:10–13; 45:8
  Deuteronomy 32:1–21a
  Deuteronomy 32:21b–43

- Anthem of the Night
- Canon
- The Praise *(Teshbôḥtâ)*
- *Karôzûtâ*

Ṣaprâ

- Opening Prayers
- Fixed Morning Psalms (Pss 100, 91, 104:1–5, 113, 93, 148, 149, 150, 116)
- *Lakûmārâ* Hymn
- Psalm 51
- Canon
- *Karôzûtâ*
- *Trisagion*
- Final Prayers

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PSALMODY. In the first *mawtbâ*[71] of the night vigil, which is divided in to eight installments of psalmody called *hullalâ*, three psalms are chanted that allude to Sheol: Psalms 86:13, 88:3–14, and 89:48. Together the verses offer a long and relatively detailed description of Sheol and the diminished state of those therein. They affirm that no human being who lives can escape the hand of death or flee the depths of Sheol.

In the second station, Psalm 116 is sung, repeating the verse heard at ramshâ. The final installment is a series of canticles: Exodus 15:1–21, Isaiah 42:10–13, 45:8; and Deuteronomy 32:1–43. The final canticle, also known as the "song of Moses" speaks of the fire of God's wrath burning, even unto the depths of Sheol (see v. 22).

EUCHOLOGY. As in *ramshâ*, the descent motif colors the way Christ is invoked in the *kārôzūtâ* (2:525). However, as the liturgy moves into morning, the violence and destruction associated with the motif become more pronounced. While at Christ's death the dead came out to proclaim hope (or indict the Jews), now Christ destroys the abode of the dead:

> Messiah, who shook the foundations of Sheol, the mansion of death, . . .
> Redeemer of all of us, Messiah our Lord, who by your passion conquered death and made our nature victorious over the tyranny of Satan . . . . (2:525)

The imagery of quaking foundations emphasizes the destruction of death's abode, while the second invocation introduces a theological point. Christ, having put on humanity, has made human nature *(kyānan)* victorious over the power of death. The implication is that it is only by having put on flesh that he was able to enter and deceive death, as the traditional

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71. Literally, "session." Originally the term was used for intercalated liturgical poetry sung seated during a series of psalms (like the Byzantine καθισματα). The liturgical usage here is basically the equivalent to a Latin-rite *nocturn*.

narrative threads together. Thus, those who have put on Christ, have the hope of resurrection from the dead.

PROPER HYMNODY. In connection with this theme of illumination, an anthem extolls:

> Come children, and hear me. Those who have stood up from water, you have risen up from the dead, you have put on Christ, you have put on the Holy Spirit, in whose light you will put on eternal life. (2:518)

Here the connection between descent to the tomb, to Sheol, and into the font is drawn. The light is the Holy Spirit who is the pledge of eternal life. The verse associates the baptized Christian's baptismal death and resurrection with Christ's descent and resurrection.

The final stanza of the main morning anthem, the *'ônîtâ dlelyâ*, speaks of the descent in this manner:

> . . . What is this? The sanctuary was rent at his killing, and at his voice the dead were raised. To the thief he promised the kingdom. He is the Messiah, the vivifier of our mortality. Come my brothers, let us hasten to his adoration, who for our whole nature tasted death and let us all shout to him without end, "Lord of all, glory to you." (2:524)

The anthem plots the events of Christ's death according to the gospel accounts. Then, it interjects the call to adoration as a proclamation of faith, like the call of the centurion. Again, the whole of human nature is vivified by Christ's death and resurrection. The *lakûmārâ* (see below) is the same as in *ṣaprâ* (2:527).

Great Sunday of the Resurrection

Table 4.2
Order of Liturgies of Great Sunday of the Resurrection

■ *Ramshâ* of Great Sunday of the Resurrection
■ Liturgy of Baptism
[■ Liturgy of Pardon]
■ Liturgy of the Eucharist

- *Lelyâ*
- *Qālâ dshahrâ*
- *Ṣaprâ*
- Liturgy of Peace of the Resurrection
- Liturgy of the Eucharist

Ramshâ

The celebration of Great Sunday opens with *ramshâ* on Saturday. It is longer than usual, with biblical readings added. Since the office is substantially the same as the evening before, I will call attention to two pertinent proper elements: the lections and the psalm (the *zûmārâ*).[72]

The readings prescribed are Genesis 22:1–19; Jonah 2:1–10; 1 Corinthians 1:18–31; Psalm 88:5–6; Matthew 27:62–66 (2:529). This order of readings juxtaposes the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, the plight of Jonah in the belly of the whale, the wisdom of the Cross, and Jesus' announcement that in three days he would rise, which causes the authorities to place guards at the tomb. The Gospel continues in the chronology of the passion narratives, but the sense of the space of three days is interpreted by Jonah's song. In it, Jonah describes his descent to Sheol, his being closed up in it, then his ultimate deliverance by God who heard Jonah's vow of praise and obedience.

The *zûmārâ*, Psalm 88:5–6, also speaks of being like the killed ones in the grave, of being forsaken in the depths of the pit. This echoes not only the Jonah reading, but helps to

72. The ܙܘܡܪܐ is an alleluia psalm with verse that is sung before the Gospel.

specify the whereabouts of Jesus in the three days, about which the passion narratives are silent.

Paschal Vigil

The liturgy of baptism is celebrated after *ramshâ*. Then follows a celebration of the eucharist. This eucharist is not the central or culminating eucharist, but seems to have been included to complete the liturgy of baptism.[73] The descent motif appears in two places in particular: the readings and the anthems. The reading prescribed in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, which explains that "for as in Adam human beings die, so also in the Messiah they will all live (v. 22)."

The anthem of the mysteries is one of the few liturgical uses of personification that was so prevalent in the literary tradition. Death speaks:

> All the power of my strength has been trampled down and lost, for the Messiah rose from the place of the dead and enlightened the world to its end. (2:530)

The destruction of Sheol—the breaking of the gates, the trampling of Death—is linked with a simultaneous enlightening of the world. The anthem called the *dḥîlat* ("Awesome are you"), which accompanies the communion of the clergy, draws together Psalm 16:9–10 and Acts 2:26–27. It proclaims that death could not hold Jesus, nor did God leave him in Sheol but raised him up.

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73. See Mateos, *Lelya-Ṣapra*, 234. This also suggests that baptism is a later addition to the paschal vigil.

Lelyâ* and the *Qālâ dshahrâ

The vigil is extended through the night into the morning, but it does not have the long readings that characterize the vigils in the Roman and Byzantine rites.[74] The *lelyâ* has only one division of psalmody, 93–101.[75] The anthem *dlelyâ* gives Satan a voice in the events of the Pasch:

> Behold, The whole creation has been renewed in the Messiah who became the head of new life. For in him the power of death has been loosed and by his voice he raised the dead and behold Satan groans loudly and says, "Woe to me for I have become a laughing stock to Adam and his children. For behold Jesus has let me go from my power and he plucked my possessions from my hands and by his resurrection he has allotted life to his race." (2:531)

Here, personification reappears as Satan is given a voice. Also, the image of despoiling and the lament of Satan are introduced. There are echoes in the thanksgiving *(teshboḥtâ)* that gives praise to the "one who liberated our race from slavery to the wicked one and of death" (2:92).

In terms of euchology, the motif figures in the *kārôzûtâ*, three invocations of which are particular strong:

> Messiah, who by the resurrection of his holy body the gates of Sheol were broken and he loosed sin and death by his resurrection,
> Messiah, who by the resurrection of his holy body destroyed death and gave us new life and renewed all creation by his resurrection,
> Messiah, who by the resurrection of his holy body made the dead alive in their tombs and raised up all human nature from mortality by his resurrection. . . . (2:532)

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74. Mateos suggests that there was a some point in the tradition at period for sleep between vigil and *qālâ dshahrâ*. See Mateos, *Lelya-Ṣapra*, 235, citing Pseudo-George of Arbela of the eleventh century.

75. Known in Syriac as a *hûlālâ* (ܗܘܠܠܐ) A *hûlālâ* is a liturgical subdivision of the 150 psalms. The 150 psalms are grouped into twenty *hûlālê*, which comprise two to four individual psalms.

The emphasis now has shifted from the descent to the resurrection from the place of the dead, consonant with the transition the Sunday of the Resurrection.

Ṣaprâ

Table 4.3
Ṣaprâ of Resurrection Sunday

- Opening Prayers
- Fixed Morning Psalms (Pss 100, 91, 104:1–5, 113, 93, 148, 149, 150, 116)
- Anthem of the Morning
- The Praise *(Teshbôḥtâ)*
- Canticle of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
- *Lbaktâ* (Festal Poetic Composition)
- *Zûmārâ:* Ps 16:9
- Gospel: Luke 24:1–12
- *Tûrgāmâ*
- The Praise *(Teshbôḥtâ)*
- *Trisagion*
- Final Prayers

The morning office is slightly different because it follows the festal rather than ferial order. The opening orations of the morning office (*ṣaprâ*) are highly developed and eloquent prayers that extol the theme of light. While these are part of the ordinary or festal *ṣaprâ*, their use of the light theme and illumination echoes the illumination of the realm of the dead at Christ's entry.

The proper antiphon for the Canticle of the Three Children (Dn 3:57–88), known as the *dbarek*, highlights the descent motif:

> By your resurrection, Redeemer of all, redemption has come to be for all the nations, sin has been dismissed from our race, and death devoured by victory. Great redemption is ours for our redeemer has risen from the grave. . . . (2:536–537)

It emphasizes the universality of redemption and the destruction of death using digestive imagery. The short *tûrgāmâ* following the Gospel (Luke 24:1–12) expounds on the women's encounter in the garden. "You are seeking Jesus! He rose and conquered death by his death" (2:538). It ascribes a core element of the apostolic proclamation of the resurrection to the women at the tomb (cf. Acts 2:24–27, which asserts, "It was impossible that he be taken captive by Sheol").

Peace of the Resurrection

Table 4.4
The Liturgy of Peace of the Resurrection

- Opening Prayers
- Psalmody: Psalms 150, 116
- Anthems
- Procession
- Canon: Psalm 97, Isaiah 42:10–13; 45:8
- The Praise *(Teshbôḥtâ)*
- *Karôzûtâ*
- Exchange of Peace
- The Teaching *(Malpānûtâ)*
- The Blessings

The liturgy of the exchange of paschal peace takes the image of peace *(shlāmâ)* as "the immediate and comprehensive effect of our Lord's resurrection."[76] The ritual actions focus on the retrieval of the cross from the sanctuary where it was placed Friday of the Passion evening. The presider carries the cross in procession together with the gospel book, candles, olive branches, and incense while a series of anthems is sung. The procession can

76. Pathipulangara, 185.

move outside the church and go around it or at least it moves around inside the church.[77] It reaches its conclusion at the *bêmâ*.[78] After the *kārôzûtâ* the deacon bids the worshipers to give peace to one another. They venerate the cross and gospel book on the *bêmâ* and then greet one another, "The resurrection of our Lord be with you." The person responds, "Resurrection, life, and renewal be with you" (2:552).

While peace is the dominant image of the liturgy, it draws on the whole gamut of paschal imagery to praise God for the redemption wrought for all humankind in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Thus, the descent motif is highlighted and expressed with particular eloquence.

The liturgy opens with a series of hymns and versicles that first give praise to God and declare the cosmic scope of the resurrection. They shift to make anamnesis of the life of Christ, then describe in detail the passion and crucifixion. To speak of the resurrection, the anthems declare:

> Death groans, and Satan is sad; but the Church rejoices at the resurrection of the Son. (2:541)

The anthems then both praise God in Christ and declare the Church's praise for the Pasch.

During the procession the motif emerges in connection with light imagery, consonant with the morning celebration. The antiphon begins "Arise, shine forth for you light has come

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77. The ritual prescriptions lack great detail. See *hûdrâ* 2:543 and 2:545. See also Pathipulangara, 196–199.

78. The fact that the procession stops in the middle of the church belies a now disappeared ritual of placing the tomb in the center of the church, not behind the altar. See A. Raes, "La Paix pascale dans le rite chaldéen," *L'Orient Syrien* 6 (1961): 67–79, esp. 77–78.

and the glory of the Lord will shine on you" (2:543) echoing Isaiah 60:1. Further on the anthem reports:

> Jonah was in the bowels of the fish three days and three nights. And Jonah prayed before the Lord God in the bowels of the fish, and said: "I invoked the Lord in my distress and he answered me." And the Lord commanded the fish, and it threw up Jonah on dry land. (2:544)

It continues:

> Jonah, son of Matay, through his descent to the abyss painted an example *(ṭûpseh)* of our Lord, for he left without dying *(wanpaq kad lâ mît)*. And Jesus rose and was not corrupted and death held no power over his body. Glory to you our Lord, glory to you, Son of God, blessed is he who in his resurrection vivified all. (2:545)

This ambiguous stanza recalls later literary appeal to Jonah. It uses language of image-making, which is a frequent metaphor in Ephraem's writings. The versicle interprets the biblical passage to say that Jonah did not die. But it does not dwell on the distinction that Jesus did die. The following qualification that "death held no power" would allow that Jesus did die, but as other elements of the narrative omitted here explain, Death could not bear the ferment of life in its midst.

The hymnody plays with the temporal succession of events of the descent and repeats the appeal to the shaking of the foundations of Sheol:

> You shook the foundations of Death at the time the wood of your cross was erected, Lord, and Sheol in terror sent away those debtors whom it had devoured. Your command vivified them, Lord, and because of this we also praise you, King Messiah, have mercy on us! (2:546)

The shaking came not from the voice of the Lord, but from the fixing of the cross on Golgotha. In fear of what was to come, Sheol expels its captives. The voice of the Lord then vivifies, all of which could transpire without Jesus' having descended to Sheol.

The image of the shaking foundations is repeated and connected with the sleepers rising and proclaiming the power of the Lord's death to slay death:

> . . . As proof of your glorious resurrection the bodies of the holy ones who had been asleep arose and left, giving glory to your great power O Lord (2:546)

The hymnody then shifts to narrate the wonders of the Resurrection. In a lengthy stanza the events are emplotted and explained:

> Who is able to tell the great power of the cross that vivified the dead in their tombs? For they entered and proclaimed to creation its great and adorable power of the Messiah, the Son of God. They reproved the scribes and pharisees of the unjust Jews: "This is the victorious King who gained victory through his cross. The prophets in their prophecies called him wonderful names: David called him 'wonderful child' and Isaiah 'mighty one of the world' and the archangel Gabriel announced him 'Son of the Highest'. The one from Tarsus proclaimed him Messiah, God over all, and Abraham, father of the nations, saw his killing in the sacrifice of his son. And again he raised us from the graves that we become witnesses to his resurrection." (2:546–547)

The proclamation of the Lord's resurrection by the righteous is turned into invective here, as in the anthem from Saturday. The important theme in the literary tradition, that Christ descend to seek out Adam and restore him to Paradise appears in a later stanza:

> The gate of the graves was opened, the downtrodden broke their yokes, death was destroyed, and the dead lived and came out. The gates of Sheol wore out, its walls collapsed, and Adam returned to his place. (2:548)

The following canon is sung with Isaiah 42:10–13; 45:8:

> Blessed be the king who descended to Sheol and lifted us up and by his resurrection promised renewal to our race. At your resurrection creatures cried glory for they join in the redemption that is for all. (2:551)

After the exchange of the paschal peace, a lengthy *malpānûtâ* (teaching) follows. Again, the controlling image is that of peace and exaltation of the day of the resurrection. The salvific significance of the day is explained in connection with the descent to Sheol:

> Come in peace day upon which death does not tread . . . Come in peace first-born of days of both worlds that has been adorned with your gifts. Death descended and life went up. Sheol is shut up; Baptism is opened. . . . The door of the grave is a bridal chamber *(bêt gnôneh)* of the killed one. Here, let us all cry out and say, "Where is your sting, O Death? Where is your victory, Sheol?" (2:554)

The descent to Sheol, the closing of Sheol with the commensurate opening of the baptismal font is the first allusion to the connection of the baptism and the descent to Sheol. The quote of First Corinthians 15, itself a quote of the prophets Isaiah and Hosea, is juxtaposed with the identification of the grave as a bridal chamber.

Great Sunday Eucharist

Table 4.5
The Liturgy of the Eucharist

- Entrance Rites
    - Opening Prayers
    - Procession to the *Bêmâ*
    - Anthem of the Rails
    - Incensation
    - *Lakûmārâ* Hymn
- Liturgy of the Word
    - Trisagion
    - OT Readings (2)
    - Interval
    - Epistle
    - *Zûmārâ* and Gospel Procession
    - Gospel
    - Homily
    - *Karôzûtâ*
- Liturgy of the Eucharist
    - Prostrations and Dismissals
    - Transfer of the Gifts and Procession to Altar
    - Anthem of the Mysteries
    - Creed
    - Preparatory Prayers and Washing of Hands
    - Peace
    - Anaphora
    - Private Prayers of Presider
    - Incensation
    - Elevation
    - Fraction and Consignation
    - *Karôzûtâ*
    - Prayer of Absolution

Lord's Prayer
Sancta Sanctis
Dḥîlat (Awesome are You) and Communion of Clergy
Diaconal Acclamation
Anthem of the *Bêmâ*
Communion of the Assembly
The Praise *(Teshbôḥtâ)*

- Concluding Prayers

In the central eucharist of the paschal celebration, the anthem of the rails takes up the descent motif, echoing the texts of the night before:

> Mortals, exult and take heart! For the power of death has been broken. The Messiah conquered death by his passion and promised life by his resurrection. Behold, heaven and earth rejoice, the company of angels shout glory to the one who restored life to the human race that had been lost by his resurrection. (2:556)

These themes are echoed in the communion anthem, which has the following trope;

> On the day of your resurrection death has been destroyed and Satan has fallen down, and resurrection *(nûḥāmâ)* has begun to reign over all. (2:558)

The lections for the day also resonate with the themes of the descent. The first reading, Isaiah 60: 1–7 gives the illumination and light theme focus. First Samuel 2:1–10 is the so-called song of Hannah, which praises God who kills and gives life, who sends to Sheol and raises up. Romans 5:20–6:23 gives Paul's vigorous insistence that the baptized Christian, having died and risen with Christ in baptism, cannot persist in sin. The phrases "death no longer rules him" and that all have passed "from the dead" to new life in Christ reinforce the effects of the descent—all now share, through baptism in the victory won. Psalm 97:1, the *zûmārâ*, asserts that "the Lord rules," underlining that the rule of death has passed. The Gospel, John 20:1–18, recounts Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Lord.

In terms of ritual action in the eucharist, the transfer of the gifts and procession to the altar merits consideration. While there are no explicit liturgical texts that connect the transfer to the descent to Sheol,[79] from the time of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) a death mysticism has influenced the popular imagination in the Syriac church.[80] Theodore explains the transfer of the gifts as the leading of Christ to the passion and later a funeral cortege of the dead Christ. He depicts the placing of the gifts of bread and wine on the altar as the laying in the tomb, and the veiling of the gifts as the winding sheets of the corpse. The

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79. The relevant sources are assembled and analyzed by Jammo, *Structure de la Messe*, 157–189. The later commentators have a more global approach that connects passion, death, and resurrection in close association of transfer of the gifts and the anaphora. See Pauly Maniyattu, *Heaven on Earth: The Theology of Liturgical Spacetime in the East Syrian Qurbana* (Rome: Mar Thoma Yogam, 1995), 223–242.

However, in the development of the Byzantine liturgy Psalm 24 was taken up as the chant at the transfer of the gifts. See Robert F. Taft, *The Great Entrance: A History of the Transfer of the Gifts and other Preanaphoral Rites of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, 2d ed., Orientalia Christiana Analecta 200 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1978), 83–118. See also Sebastià Janeras, *Le Vendredi-Saint dans la tradition liturgique byzantine: Structure et histoire de ses sources*, Analecta Liturgica 12 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1988), 417–425, who discusses the influence of the burial procession of Good Friday on the Great Entrance. Psalm 24 has since disappeared and only its antiphon, the troparion known as the *Cherubikon* remains. This has a parallel in the Armenian liturgy's transfer of the gifts, which has Psalm 24 with the Cherubikon borrowed from Byzantine sources. Psalm 24:7–10 was closely associated with the descent to Sheol and Christ's breaking the gates of Hades, in both the Greek homiletic and apocryphal tradition. The number of paschal themes that the psalm draws in—entry into Jerusalem, funeral cortege, harrowing of hell, resurrection, and ascension to heaven—may well have lead to its inclusion once a passion-oriented interpretation was developed, or conversely, it may have given rise to a passion-oriented interpretation, given that the burial motif does not appear in Byzantine commentaries until Germanus (d. 733). See A. Rose, "«Attolite portas vestras . . . » Aperçus sur la lecture chrétienne du Ps. 24 (23) B," in *Miscellanea liturgica in onore di sua eminenza il Cardinale Giacomo Lecaro, arcivescovo di Bologna, presidente del "Consilium" per l'applicazione della costituzione sulla sacra liturgia* (Rome, Paris, Tournai, New York: Desclée, 1966–1967), 1:453–478; R. Taft, "Psalm 24 at the Transfer of the Gifts in the Byzantine Liturgy: A Study in the Origins of a Liturgical Practice," in *The Word in the World. Essays in Honor of Frederick L. Moriarty, SJ*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and George W. MacRae (Cambridge, Mass.: Weston College Press, 1973).

80. It should be noted that Theodore explains the transfer of the gifts in the Antiochene liturgy, of which the Byzantine liturgy is the primary descendant. However, the Interpreter's commentary was highly influential in Syriac-speaking churches.

deacons who then fan the gifts give them honor like the angels who stood at the tomb until the resurrection.[81] Narsai echoes Theodore, describing the procession of the deacons as the procession to death, with the altar being the place of death and the tomb.[82]

Gabriel Qatrayâ depicts the ritual action of the singing of the anthem of the mysteries as the song of the angels and souls of the Just when they entered into Paradise with the soul of the Lord. As well it echoes the song of the angels when the earth quaked and the temple veil was rent, and the dead arose at the passing of the Lord.[83]

Evaluation

This examination of the paschal liturgies confirms that the descent motif is a constitutive soteriological element. When considered in light of the literary tradition, however, several striking features appear. First, the literary tradition made extensive use of personification of Satan, Death, and Sheol. The liturgy, however, tends to avoid the highly personified accounts of the subterranean activity of Jesus. Second, the literary tradition called on elaborate narrative schemes, emplotment, and biblical examples to present the motif. The liturgy, in contrast, takes up mere traces or allusions to a larger narrative frame. Third, the

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81. See Homily 15:25–27. Syriac text in Tonneau and Devreesse, 503–509. Theodore does admit that the fans serve the practical purpose of keeping bird droppings off the gifts (and likely flying insects as well). This is indeed very reverent and honorable, let alone sanitary! (*Homily* 15:27).

82. "Homily XVII: An Exposition of the Mysteries," in *Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, ed. R. H. Connolly, Text and Studies 8 (Cambridge: 1909), nos. 3–4, and 11–12. What is ironic is that Theodore is commenting on the liturgy of *Antioch* and his interpretation influence Narsai, who comments on the liturgy of *Edessa*. Either through Theodore or through Narsai these interpretations extend to Gabriel Qatrayâ and into the East Syrian liturgical commentaries.

83. Text in Jammo, 38, from his Latin translation of British Museum Or. 3336, fol. 182v–211v. A critical Syriac text is wanting.

literary tradition revealed the juxtaposition and coalescing of various systems of imagery (cosmic, digestive, seasonal) that bolsters the motif and connected it with the life-world of the church. The liturgy, however, makes little appeal to these rich imagery systems. Finally, the later literary tradition favored an account of salvation history that juxtaposed Adam's loss of Paradise with his restoration to Paradise, when Christ seeks him out in Sheol. The liturgy avoids developing this "two-Adam" redemptive scheme, but preserves traces of it.

THE EAST SYRIAN EPIPHANY (*DENḤÂ*) LITURGY

In the homiletic tradition of Narsai and Jacob of Sarug, the descent to Sheol is linked to the descent into the Jordan. The question arises whether this association is sustained in the liturgical celebration of the feast of *denḥâ*, the East Syrian Epiphany feast that takes the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan as the central event. Like the Paschal feast, the feast of *denḥâ* (the root *dnḥ* means "to shine forth," "to appear," "to manifest") in the East Syrian tradition has certain particularities. The observance of an Epiphany celebration on or about 6 January was most likely established in the early second century in Asia Minor whence it spread to Syria and Palestine, though some scholars argue for its origins in Egypt.[84] From its origins the feast in the Syriac-speaking churches has focused on the nativity and Christ's baptism in the

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84. See Gabriele Winkler, "Neue Überlegungen zur Entstehung des Epiphaniefests," *ARAM* 5 (1993): 603–633. See also Thomas Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 2d emended ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 103–128. Talley rejects its origins in pagan festivals. Merja Merras reviews the theories and offers her own, namely that Epiphany is a Christianized Tabernacles feast: *The Origins of the Celebration of the Christian Feast of the Epiphany: An Ideological, Cultural and Historical Study*, University of Joensuu Publications in the Humanities 16 (Joensuu, Finland: Joensuu University Press, 1995). Gabriele Winkler has strong but not entirely unmerited criticism of Merras. See her review in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 63 (1997): 226–230.

Jordan.[85] Until the late fourth century it also was the principal day for the celebration of baptism.[86]

The current celebration of the Epiphany consists of the all-night vigil with directives for the celebration of baptism after *ṣaprâ* before eucharist. The feast begins with festal *ramshâ*, then the *lelyâ, qālâ dshahrâ*, and *ṣaprâ*. Close examination of the texts reveals that the motif of the descent to Sheol is not a predominate image in the celebration of the Epiphany, despite its appearance in the literary tradition in this context.

Ramshâ

In the royal anthem (*ʿônîtâ dbāsālîqê*), the fifth to sixth strophe connects the Epiphany with the Pasch:

> Let us adore the glorious epiphany of the Messiah our king! For by it death ceased and you extinguished Satan and sin. True life reigned and good hope is to all (1:619)

The theme of Christ's *denḥâ*, "shining forth" is contrasted with the darkness of sin and Satan. The shining forth is not quite the illumination that is described in the descent motif, which is directed to the ancestors. Here, the emphasis falls on the power of the light to conquer the darkness.

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85. Ephraem gives the classic theology of the feast in his Hymns on the Nativity/Epiphany. See *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, CSCO 186–187, Scriptores Syri 82–83 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1959).

86. It would seem that under the influence of Palestine in the fourth century, Edessa began to practice paschal baptism. Merras suggests that Nisibis knew only Epiphany baptism, so Ephraem was first exposed to paschal baptism when he went to Edessa (see pp. 189–190).

Lelyâ

Without clearly linking Christ's descent into the river Jordan with the descent to Sheol or connecting his coming out of the river with his resurrection from the 'place of the dead', the versicles at the night vigil speak of Christ's baptism as giving an "example" *(tûpsâ)* of his resurrection (1:621) or showing an example "of his death and resurrection" (1:622).

In a liturgical canon, the Epiphany and the Pasch are together part of the saving mystery of God's redemption of the human race:

> He set free our race by his revelation and by his passion and death he saved us and through his glorious resurrection he raised our mortal race. (1:625)

In the following canon some reference is made to Sheol:

> And he was baptized in the Jordan by his servant John because light kindles . . . and it blazes unto the depths of Sheol. Blessed is the life and the greatness of life *(rab ḥayê)* that he showed us from heaven and in his baptism in the waters. He gave us adoption as children. (1:637)

The theme of the light shining on the water permeates the texts. Here the light on the water is identified with the presence of the watchers who cry "holy." It is the light of Christ that shines forth, a fire that blazes even unto Sheol.[87] The verse however does not go so far as to connect the Jordan River to Sheol, which an author like Jacob described as a "dead sea." Neither does it strike a parallel between the descent to the Jordan and the descent to Sheol. Instead, the themes of the Epiphany are invoked: By his birth and Epiphany, Christ has transformed mortal human nature, granting it life and the gift of adoption of children, a common theme of baptism.

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87. For detailed study of the literary tradition, see Gabriele Winkler, "Die Lichte-Erscheinung bei der Taufe Jesu und der Ursprung des Epiphaniefestes. Eine Untersuchung griechischer, syrischer, armenischer und lateinischer Quellen," *Oriens Christianus* 78 (1994): 177–229.

Use of the descent/ascent motif does occur in reference to the Holy Spirit, though. The Spirit of Holiness descends and rests upon Jesus in the likeness of a dove. It hovers over him as the voice from heaven declares his sonship.[88]

In the *qālâ dshahrâ* the water is extolled and a pastiche of scripture verses speaks of the water as the depth or depths (1:641–5). The snippets of Psalms 68:22; 69:2, and 14 are used to liken the Jordan to the depths, and Psalm 74:13 speaks of crushing the heads of the dragon dwelling in the water. However this dragon or Leviathan is not explicitly connected with the destruction of Satan, Death, or Sheol.

Ṣaprâ

The canon of *ṣaprâ* recounts the history of salvation reaching back to creation through the incarnation and epiphany to the second coming. He announces "in his resurrection he rose and raised us" but no reference is made to the descent, where it might ordinarily be anticipated (1:652)

In the morning anthem, the whole theme of epiphany is summed up:

> Blessed be the Messiah who sanctified us by his baptism and gave us a figure (tûpsâ) of everlasting life. . . . Messiah who was baptized and shone forth and enlightened all, make your peace dwell in your people whom you chose (1:653)

In the eucharist, the place of the Epiphany in the unfolding of the economy of salvation and in its extension in the sacramental celebration of the church is captured in the communion verse, "Of Your Body and Blood":

> We have been sanctified by water and the Spirit; through your Body and Blood we gain life. O good One who fashioned us from the dust, through water and the Spirit you renewed our

88. See inter alia 1:638.

> image; through water and the Spirit you fashioned us anew. Glorious is your renewal, and lovely is your coming! (1:654)

Thus, the renewal of humanity, the restoration of humanity's primordial image are related to the Spirit and baptism and sustained by the eucharist.

The controlling narrative for *denḥâ* is the baptism of Christ in the Jordan. While this is configured to the Pasch of Christ in the typically unified vision of salvation history in the Syrian churches, the descent to Sheol motif does not assume a dominant role. Rather, the liturgy juxtaposes hymns, psalms, and euchology that focus on the water of the Jordan, the voice from heaven, the intervention of the heavenly witnesses, the descent of the Spirit to rest on Jesus, and the shining light of his manifestation. What appears in the literary tradition's development of the motif particularly in Jacob and Narsai, namely the link between the descent into the Jordan and the descent to Sheol, is not appropriated by the liturgy.

THE EAST SYRIAN EUCHARIST *(QÛRBĀNÂ)*

In both the liturgies of the Pasch and Epiphany, the celebration of eucharist and baptism are a matter of course. I will look at the ordinary of the eucharistic liturgy and the liturgy of baptism. Two elements of the East Syrian eucharist relate to the descent motif. I take them up here to see how the descent motif might influence the ritual pattern of the liturgy and also to consider how the weekly celebration mediates the descent motif in its ordinary texts. The first is the hymn *lākûmārâ*, "You, O Lord." The second is the anaphora.

Lākûmārâ

In addition to being a regular part of the offices, the hymn, "You, O Lord," is the primitive entrance antiphon of the East Syrian liturgy's introductory rite.[89] After the salutation, "Peace be with you," the hymn began and accompanied the procession to the *bêmâ*:

> You, O Lord of all, we confess. You, Jesus Messiah, we glorify, for you are the quickener of our bodies and the savior of souls.[90]

The hymn isolates one aspect of the salvific activity of Jesus, namely that he is the one who brings bodies to life. The simple phrase alludes to both the descent motif and with baptism. Christ descended to Sheol and brought life to those sleeping the sleep of death. The language and imagery of Aphrahat and Ephraem could be used to describe the eschatological impact of the descent: Jesus left there the leaven of life that is the pledge of resurrection from the dead. This leaven will ferment and fill all of Sheol. Likewise, in a Mopsuestian line of thinking, the assembly participated sacramentally in the death and resurrection and so have received the pledge of resurrection to eternal life. Part of the ritual action that accompanies this hymn is now the veneration of the cross, connecting the assembly to the triumphant cross of the risen Lord.[91]

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89. Jammo, 77–78.

90.
ܠܟ ܡܪܐ ܕܟܠܐ ܡܘܕܝܢܢ ܘܠܟ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܫܒܚܝܢܢ ܕܐܢܬܘ ܡܢܚܡܢܐ ܕܦܓܪܝܢ ܘܐܢܬܘ ܦܪܘܩܐ ܕܢܦܫܬܢ

91. The veneration shifted to this hymn, but originally seems to have been done during the anthem of the rails (from the tenth century). See Yousif, "Divine Liturgy," 201–202.

Anaphoras

There are three anaphoras currently in use in the East Syrian Church. They are known commonly as the anaphoras of Addai and Mari, of Theodore, and of Nestorius. The anaphora is a significant liturgical genre that draws the narrative of the history of salvation into blessing, which the language of the people shapes. The memorial is ordered to the invocation that the assembly and its gifts be transformed through the sacramental sharing of communion.

Addai and Mari and Theodore

The theme of the descent to Sheol is absent from the anamnestic section of the most frequently used anaphora, Addai and Mari. It is only in the epiclesis that a hint of the descent to Sheol or its ongoing effects comes in. The anaphora invokes the Holy Spirit to come that the offering might be "for the great hope of the resurrection from the place of the dead."[92] Addai and Mari is an early anaphora, perhaps as early as the third century. It would have been composed or compiled at a time when the descent tradition itself was taking on greater significance and more prolixity.

The same phraseology is repeated in the epiclesis of the anaphora of Theodore the Interpreter (of Mopsuestia).[93] And Christ is named, following Colossians 1:18, the "first born

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92. ܘܠܣܒܪܐ ܪܒܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܡܝ̈ܬܐ
Gelston, 54.

93. The anaphora is prescribed from the season of the Annunciation through Hosanna Sunday. For the Syriac text I am dependent on the Chaldean *textus receptus* (where the anaphora is simply designated "the second hallowing"): *Missale iuxta ritum ecclesiae syrorum orientalium id est Chaldaeorum* (Mossul: Typis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1901). The phrase in question is on 67.

of the dead" *(bûkrâ dmen bêt mîtê)* in the postsanctus.[94] This anaphora is a later composition, when the golden period of the literary tradition had fully developed the descent motif. Here, such brief mention might not have the impact on those who pray, given that they would be accustomed to the more elaborate hymnic tradition.

Nestorius

The anaphora of Nestorius[95] is the only East Syrian anaphora that makes explicit mention of the descent motif. In the anamnestic postsanctus, the anaphora recalls the whole scope of salvation history. It speaks of baptism, which gives us the power to become children of God and which sanctifies human beings by the Holy Spirit, who are buried with Christ and rise with him. Christ loved human beings to the end, and gave himself for all:

> He descended to Sheol and loosed the chains of death. And because it was not right that he would be held in Sheol by death, the chief of our redemption rose on the third day, and he became chief of the sleepers that he would be first in all, and ascended to heaven.[96]

The more elaborate attention given to the descent motif in this anaphora parallels the later literary tradition's attention to the descent as a key moment in the unfolding of salvation history. Here in the anaphora it echoes the role it has in the homiletic and hymnic tradition. A more theoretical analysis will follow in the next chapter where doxology will be examined.

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94. See *Missale*, 61.

95. This anaphora is prescribed for use on Holy Thursday, *Denḥâ*, Friday of the Commemoration of John the Baptist, Friday of the Commemoration of the Greek Doctors, and Wednesday of the Rogation of the Ninevites. William Macomber, in personal correspondence dated 16 July 1999, explained that because of its length this anaphora—like Theodore—is rarely, if ever, used among Catholics. For the Syriac I am dependent on the *Missale Chaldaeorum* (where it is designated the "third hallowing").

96. ܘܢܚܬ ܠܫܝܘܠ ܘܫܪܐ ܐܣܘܪܘܗܝ ܕܡܘܬܐ. ܘܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܙܕܩ ܗܘܐ ܕܢܬܬܚܝܕ ܗܘ ܒܫܝܘܠ
ܡܢ ܡܘܬܐ ܪܝܫܐ ܕܦܘܪܩܢܢ ܩܡ ܠܬܠܬܐ ܝܘܡܝܢ ܘܗܘܐ ܪܝܫܐ ܕܕܡܟܐ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܩܕܡܝ ܒܟܠ ܘܣܠܩ ܠܫܡܝܐ

The East Syrian Baptismal Liturgy

On both Pasch and Epiphany the East Syrian church has traditionally celebrated baptism, though baptism at Epiphany only is more likely the original practice. Given the significance of the descent theme among the paschal texts and the allusions in the homiletic tradition on Epiphany, I will examine the baptism liturgy for the presence of the descent motif.

The relationship between the descent to Sheol and baptism is a theme of capital importance in the Greek commentaries on baptism after the fourth century. Cyril of Jerusalem is a classic representative of this thinking of the day. The threefold immersion into the baptismal font points through symbol *(dia sumbolou)* to the three day burial of Christ in the earth.[97] These and other Greek and Latin texts have lead some authors to speak of the "soteriological foundation of Christian baptism" in the descent to Sheol.[98]

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97. Mystagogical Catechesis 2:4. Greek text in *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. F. L. Cross (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), p. 19.

98. See Olivier Rousseau, "La Descente aux enfers, fondement sotériologique du baptême Chrétien," *Recherches de Science religieuse* 40 (1951–1952): 273–297. This issue is also titled *Mélanges Jules LeBreton* II. See also P. Lundberg, *La Typologie baptismale dans l'ancienne Église* (Upsala, 1942).

In the Syriac tradition, however, the situation is more nuanced.[99] While the great writers with their integral view of the scope of salvation history spoke of the soteriological continuity of the events of salvation, they did not claim that the descent to Sheol was the foundation of Christian baptism. Quite the contrary, it was the Jordan event that was key. The writers did not isolate the events of the mystery of salvation but saw them as part of a continuum.[100] What happens in later writers like Jacob of Sarug is that via the central event of the Pasch the descent to the Jordan and the descent to Sheol are merged. While the descent to Sheol was used to interpret or expand the meanings of Christian baptism, the ritual of baptism was not a mimesis of the three-day sojourn of Christ to Sheol. The descent to Sheol became a common trope, strengthened by appeal to Romans 6, to explain the sacramental participation of the baptizand in the Pasch.

Since the theme appears in both paschal and epiphany liturgies, which both were times of baptism, and the literary and theological tradition used the motif to explain baptism,

99. By far the dominant voice in this area is Gabriele Winkler. However, her work is not without need for critical reappraisal. Among her works, see *Das Armenische Initiationsrituale: Entwicklungsgeschichtliche und liturgievergleichende Untersuchung der Quellen des 3. bis 10. Jahrhunderts*, OCA 217 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1982), 434–439; eadem, "Zur frühchristlichen Tauftradition in Syrien und Armenien unter Einbezug der Taufe Jesu," *Ostkirchliche Studieni* 27 (1978): 154–172. See also E. C. Ratcliff, "The Old Syrian Baptismal Tradition and its Resettlement Under the Influence of Jerusalem in the IV Century," *Studies in Church History* 2 (1965): 85–99. Kilian McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 156–170, treats the relationship between the baptism of Jesus and Descent to Sheol. He relies heavily on secondary literarture and entirely on translations of the Syriac sources. His claims in the chapter's conclusion overstate and oversimplify the evidence.

100. The classic expression is given in the imagery of the "rest stop" or staging post or lodging (ܐܘܢܐ) found in Jacob or the triple begettings used by Ephraem as discussed in the last chapter. They interpenetrate and must be taken as movements in an unfolding plan of salvation.

the question is raised, what evidence is there for the appropriation of the descent motif by the East-Syrian baptismal liturgy?[101]

Table 4.6
The Liturgy of Baptism

- Opening Prayers
- Psalm 18
- Imposition of Hands and Prayer
- Consignation
- Entry to Baptistery
- Psalm 45
- *Karôzûtâ*
- Psalm 110
- *Karôzûtâ*
- Canon
- Blessing of Water
- Readings
  - 1 Cor 10:1 ff.
  - Interval
  - John 2:23–3:8
- Anthem: Holy and Feared is his Name
- "Glory to You" Psalm
- Creed
- Canon
- Blessing of Oil with Sanctus
- Doxology
- Lord's Prayer
- Blessing of the Water and Infusion of Oil
- Anointing of the *Baptizandi* (full body)

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101. It is generally held that the East Syrian baptismal rite was edited by the seventh-century patriarch, Ishô^c yahb III, who added a postbaptismal anointing, but evidence shows further development in the Middle Ages. This is attested by the fact that Pseudo-George of Arbela (see above) gives a commentary on a baptismal rite that differs from the present-day. It is suggested that Elias III (d. 1190) may be responsible for further changes. For my study here, I will use the text found in Joseph Aloysius Assemanus, *Codex liturgicus ecclesiae universae* (Rome: Angelus Rotilius, 1850; reprinted, Gregg International Publishers, 1968), 1:174–201; 2:211–145; 3:136–145. Assemanus's text is from the Vatican library manuscripts of the so-called Urmia edition. This is the version used in the first printed edition by the Anglican missionaries. Kelaytâ also produced a printed edition in 1926.

- Baptism
- Canon and Prayer
- Postbaptismal Anointing of Forehead
- Procession with Canon
  Psalm 34, Psalm 97
- Loosing of the Water
- Second Postbaptismal Chrismation

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An examination of the euchology, hymnody, psalmody, and lections for the rite of baptism reveals that the use of the descent motif is ancillary. The dominant or master image remains that of the Jordan, strongly pneumatic and messianic. While paschal imagery is also present, the descent motif is practically absent.

The strongest allusions to the descent or connections between the descent and baptism/Jordan are found in the diaconal proclamations. In the first proclamation *(kārûzôtâ)*, the deacon explains:

> As in an image he depicted and showed us the true resurrection by his holy baptism.[102]

An explicit link between the three-day rest in Sheol and the triple immersion is not made, nor is the font named tomb.[103] The primary focus is on a triple descent-ascent that figures strongly in the tradition. Christ descended into the Jordan and ascended. This parallels his descent in death to Sheol and his resurrection. This in turn is paralleled with the Christian's descent into the font and ascent.

In the second *kārûzôtâ*, the deacon exclaims:

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102. Assemanus 1:178. ܐܝܟ ܕܒܨܠܡܐ ܨܪ ܚܘܝ ܠܢ ܒܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܗ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܩܝܡܬܐ ܫܪܝܪܬܐ

103. In fact, the rubrics call the baptistery "the Jordan."

> He hallowed the waters by his holy baptism that Satan our adversary would be powerless over them who are baptized in faith in them, through the hidden power and the armor of the Spirit which they put on in them.[104]

Here a more complex mythology is at work that is tangentially related to the descent motif. The waters are identified as a dwelling place of Satan or his powers.[105] Christ's descent hallows all baptismal water because he "places" therein "hidden power" (in the literary tradition noted as the garment of light) and the "armor of the Spirit," operative again by the invocation of the Spirit over the waters, which forms the central focus of the blessing of the water.

Throughout, the euchology and hymnody are coupled together with the twofold manifestation of the Jordan event: Christ sanctified the waters to enable the sanctification of our souls. Likewise, it proclaims the baptizand's resurrection by baptism like unto Christ's (Romans 6).[106]

What is equally important to note is that while the water bath proclaims the Christian's resurrection, the anointing with oil likewise is interpreted in terms of the Pasch. The epicletic blessing prayer asks God that the Spirit come so that all who are anointed with

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104. 1:182. ܩܕܫ ܡܝܐ ܒܡܥܡܘܕܝܬܗ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܒܚܝܠܐ ܠܗܘܢ
ܘܒܙܝܢܐ ܕܪܘܚܐ ܕܠܒܫܝܢ ܒܗܘܢ ܡܬܚܠܠܝܢ ܢܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܐܝܠܝܢ ܕܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܥܡܕܝܢ ܒܗܘܢ ܣܛܢܐ ܒܥܠܕܒܒܢ

105. This theme is particularly strong in the Byzantine texts where the waters are linked to the abyss, the dwelling place of the dragon or demonic powers that shudder in dread when they behold Christ. Exorcism, which is noticeably absent from the East Syrian baptismal liturgy, is very pronounced in these Greek texts.

106. See 1:192 and 1:199 where the themes are held in tension.

it be granted a pledge of the resurrection from the dead.[107] The whole ritual of anointing and water bath accomplishes "in figure of passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord."[108]

Assessment

There is a marked contrast between the literary and liturgical traditions' respective presentations of the descent to Sheol. In contrast to the literary tradition's expansive narrative development of the descent and the eventual sedimentation of images that come to constitute the motif as it is expressed in the late golden period, the liturgy draws selectively upon key points and reconfigures them in its genres of prayer and praise. The liturgical genres and events delimit the space of interpretation of the motif in relation to the community and its connection to the paschal mystery of Christ. In the literary tradition the motif appeared in diverse genric settings but it was employed as a controlling image or narrative frame of the corpus of longer works. In the liturgy, however, a number of diverse genres converge in the course of the liturgical celebration, whose rhetorical aim is quite distinct from the poetry of the literary tradition.

The way the descent motif appears in the liturgical tradition represents a breaking of the elements of the motif so that they can be refigured to speak in a new way in the liturgical context. They take on a new density given the overlapping and intersecting of genres that contribute an expressive relationality of text, word, and community. In certain ways the

107. 1:195. ܪܗܒܘܢܐ ܕܩܝܡܬܐ ܕܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܡܝܬܐ

108. 1:197. ܒܥܡܕܐ ܗܢܐ ܡܫܬܡܠܐ ܒܛܘܦܣܐ ܕܚܫܗ ܘܕܡܘܬܗ ܘܕܩܝܡܬܗ ܕܡܪܢ

frame of the paschal triduum limits what elements of the tradition are retrieved. While the former Quartodeciman practice may well have contributed to the emphasis given the descent motif, the move to the Sunday of the Resurrection recasts elements of the tradition. Thus, the dead who come out of their graves take on a particular role in witnessing to the reality of the resurrection. While the early literary tradition emphasized the enlightenment and solidarity of all the dead with Christ in Sheol, the resurrected ones now serve as an image of testimony to the destruction of death. The influence of the scriptural and liturgical frame is perceived as well in the near absence of the motif in the epiphany liturgy, where the Jordan event is paramount.

The elements of the motif, then, are refigured to emphasize the present assembly's participation in the new life that comes from Christ's resurrection. In the liturgy for the peace of the resurrection, the texts do less remembering of the event of the descent as they move forward in doxology to dispose the assembly to share in the mystery of the resurrection. In particular this connects with baptism; but as the communion anthem explains, it is precisely in the eucharist that this pledge is given and renewed.

Yet the liturgy's use of the descent motif is not consistently oriented to this vision of the new life of the resurrection that all participate in through sacramental celebration. The liturgy in fact distorts central elements of the descent tradition. This is most clearly seen in the texts like the lengthy "forever" anthem that turn to invective against the Jewish people. In the literary tradition, there were signs that the descent motif was also summoned when the Syriac hymns turned to denounce the Jews. The liturgy, though, in the several instances noted, exploits this otherwise latent aspect of the motif. While the descent to Sheol is used

to speak of the share of all humankind—past, present, and future—in the Pasch of Christ, the liturgy calls upon the righteous ancestors to stand up and judge their kin. It exploits the liberation theme in favor of chastising the Jewish people for their ignorance, faithlessness, and villainy. The contemporary people with bitter water on their tongues sing a hymn that curses and reviles their Jewish forebears. Several texts exalt the Church for its wisdom and faith in contrast to the Jewish people, passing over a central element of the descent motif, namely the continuity of salvation history.

The interplay of texts in tradition and celebration, the selection and refiguring of images from the tradition in liturgical texts, the imaginative recasting of the motif and the potential for perversion of the motif raise many questions about liturgical language and the particular demands that the rhetorical situation of the liturgy makes on the tradition. In light of the investigation of the descent motif in the East Syrian liturgy, I will now endeavor to offer a more theoretical account of how the liturgical texts wrestle with the simultaneous assimilation and negation of other texts, what claims these liturgical texts so refigured make, and what can be done with the ideological distortion and inherent violence of this soteriological motif.

CHAPTER 5
SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION

Having set out the contours of the descent motif as it appears in the liturgies of the Pasch, Epiphany, the baptismal liturgy, and the ordinary of the eucharist of the Church of the East, I will now give a more theoretical account of the intersection and interweaving of discourses in liturgy, taking the East Syrian liturgy's deployment of the descent motif as my place of departure and case in point. This chapter is divided in two parts. The first will reflect on the character of liturgical language and rhetorical strategies that emerge from the particular case of these liturgies. My intention is to specify what is meant by saying that the liturgical tradition 'appropriates' the descent motif. The second will reflect on the relationship of the liturgical manifestation of the motif to the broader theological tradition. This will include consideration of the ethical dimensions of the motif. This chapter will appeal to philosophical and literary hermeneutics that contribute to an understanding of text and its interpretation in order to consider the interplay of forces and meanings in texts and the transformation of propositional content. While the observations that I make apply to the East Syrian liturgy, they also appertain to the liturgical language of other traditions.

In the course of my examination of the descent motif in bible, literature, and liturgy, I have operated from a perspective that attends to the multilayered sedimentations of language in the construal of the descent motif. Paying attention to genric context, I explored the dynamic assimilation, transposition, censorship, and refiguration of the descent motif in the broader Syriac literary tradition and the liturgical texts of the East Syrian liturgy in particular. In relation to such an exploration, Anthony Thiselton has raised the question, "What are we to say, however, about the kind of transformation which occurs when texts are placed in new contexts, or re-contextualized in new situations or developing traditions?"[1] As Thiselton points out, the interplay of texts and their reconstrual in new contexts requires reference to hermeneutical questions:

> The insertion of one text into the frame of another text cannot be judged either to 'enrich' the text or to do 'violence' to the text without prior reference to other questions about the choice of hermeneutical goals and the nature of what we regard as 'meaning' in this or that context.[2]

Thus, to speak about the assimilation of the descent motif in liturgical texts and the move from literary to liturgical text requires consideration of how the liturgy provides a new frame of reference for understanding and interpretation.[3] The concerns in this section, then, are to

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1. Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 36.

2. Thiselton, 42. Anthony Ugolink, for example, asserts: "For liturgy is a hermeneutic, a 'way of making meaning.' Just as a social context is necessary to reading and understanding every text, so also a social, liturgical environment is necessary to make meaning out of the scriptures. Liturgy creates the context within which the text can take on meaning." ("The Text is Not Enough," in *The Landscape of Praise: Readings in Liturgical Renewal*, ed. Blair Gilmer Meeks [Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996], 212). However, he offers no explanation as to how this is possible or necessary.

3. See Thiselton, 41.

attend to these hermeneutical problems. I will first address the nature of the transformation as the descent motif is placed in the new context of the liturgy and then set out the distinct semantic frame of the liturgy. To accomplish the first, I will appeal to Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative. With regard to the semantic frame, I will develop a literary and theological account of doxology.

The Notion of Appropriation

In order to account for the transformation of the descent motif as it is taken up in the liturgical texts, I will correlate Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative with the way liturgical texts draw selectively on the whole tradition of experiences, symbols, images, and metaphors and on the literary tradition that also inscribes and interprets them.[4]

Ricoeur's hermeneutics of time and narrative are concerned to bring together past event, present action, and future expectation in a way that mediates existential time with historical consciousness. That is to say, human persons makes sense of the temporality of their existence through narrative, telling stories. The point of this narrativity is to mediate the past, present, and future in a meaningful way that effects human action. Narratives make time "lived time" without negating the contingency of the past, present, and future. The overarching moments of this project involve interpretation and appropriation, attempting to negotiate the relationship between history, fiction, and lived time. As he argues, "Time

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4. See the remarks of Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 158.

becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."[5] Thus, he examines the way that narratives are composed. Taking the concept of *mimesis* from Aristotle's definition of tragedy as imitation of action *(mimesis praxeōs)*, Ricoeur distinguishes three movements in the construal of narrative, dubbed *mimesis*$_1$, *mimesis*$_2$, and *mimesis*$_3$. *Mimesis*$_1$ is the preunderstanding of the world, a network of symbols and mythic elements from which narratives are construed. The first mimesis sets out the symbolic resources and the conceptual frame already available in ordinary, daily language. This is the "preliterary" level. In *mimesis*$_2$ the key element is emplotment. Here the symbolic resources are given a narrative frame. Emplotment organizes the symbolic resources in a meaningful way, giving them a comprehensible beginning, middle, and end. This construal is a poetic activity that is creative and innovative. It integrates and transforms along the way as it configures. Ricoeur emphasizes that mimesis$_2$ is "the living transmission of an innovation always capable of being reactivated by a return to the creative moments of poetic activity."[6] This leads to the third mimetic relation that is defined in terms of the narrative identity of people (or an individual).[7] *Mimesis*$_3$ "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader."[8] As people read, tell, follow, and understand stories they discover a way of

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5. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1:52.

6. *Time and Narrative*, 1:68.

7. See *Time and Narrative*, 3:248.

8. *Time and Narrative*, 1:71. Terrence Tilley has offered an interesting extension of Ricoeur's mimetic relationships to events. See "Narrative Theology *Post Mortem Dei*? Paul Ricoeur's *Time and*

being and living in the world that emerges from the narratives. As Ricoeur explains, there is a dual movement at the intersection of text and reader. At this intersection, "effective action is unfolded and itself unfolds its specific temporality."[9]

This third relation entails the refiguration of narrative at the intersection of the text and the community. Ricoeur relates it to the notion of application/appropriation from Hans-Georg Gadamer.[10] Etymologically the word *appropriation* means "rendering or making one's own."[11] Ricoeur's use of it relates to Gadamer's concept of *application (Anwendung)* as integral to the task of understanding and explanation. In reaction to the Romantic separation of application from interpretation, Gadamer emphasizes that the task of interpretation is to bring the meaning of the text to bear on the present situation of the interpreter. Following Gadamer, interpretation is an event or process, a fusion of the horizons of the reader and the text. For him, "*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition*, a process of transmission in which the past and present are constantly

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Narrative, III, and Postmodern Theologies," in *Paul Ricoeur and Narrative: Context and Conversation*, ed. Morny Joy (Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 1997), 175–196.

9. *Time and Narrative*, 3:159. See 3:248–274, where Ricoeur deals with how the refiguration of mimesis$_3$ negotiates without negating the aporias of time.

10. *Time and Narrative*, 1:70.

11. The history of the term *appropriation* is discussed by Stephen Prickett, *Origins of Narrative: The Romantic Appropriation of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 26–29.

mediated."[12] The precise nature of this relationship between the text-tradition and the interpreting subject is not clarified.

Ricoeur extends Gadamer's project to maintain the integral connection of present application of text to the task of interpretation. While Gadamer takes the situation of being in a tradition as the point of departure for interpretation, Ricoeur sees the task as originating in the confrontation with language itself. It is in this sense that Ricoeur advances Gadamer's concept of application to speak of *appropriation*, a key concept in Ricoeur's hermeneutics.[13] For Ricoeur there is a dynamic and productive distance, a spatial and temporal gap between readers and any given work of discourse that they pick up. This distance gives the work a semantic autonomy from its author and accords it a surplus of meaning that is potentially addressed to anyone. Appropriation, thus, corresponds to the narrative strategy of $mimesis_3$. It begins when readers recognize that any given text is addressed to them here and now, and they "make their own" the "alien" text, rescuing it from the estrangement of distanciation. The appropriation of text is discovering and interpreting the disclosure of possible ways of being in the world. In so doing readers are enlarged by opening themselves to new capacities for knowing themselves and acting in the world.

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12. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald C. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 290, emphasis in the original. This translation is based on *Hermeneutik I. Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Gesammelte Werke1 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986). "*Das Verstehen ist selber nicht so sehr als eine Handlung der Subjektivität zu denken, sondern als Einrücken in ein Überlieferungsgeschehen*, in dem sich Vergangenheit und Gegenwart beständig vermitteln" (295).

13. What follows draws on Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in *Reflection and Imagination: A Ricoeur Reader*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 86–98; and idem, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: Christian University Press, 1976), 43–44, 91–94.

Corresponding to appropriation, then, mimesis$_3$ entails the twofold idea of the subject's discovering of self in and through the text (or ethically through the Other) while at the same time the text is working on the subject. This is "the process by which the revelation of new modes of being . . . *gives* the subject a new capacities for knowing himself."[14] Readers do not possess the text, but in fact are given to the space of meaning and so can discover a new self. Thus, Ricoeur argues, interpretation is not complete until it has released a new "event" of discourse, that by which the interpreting subject enters into the world disclosed and is disposed to transformation.

Correlation to Liturgy

Several points of Ricoeur's theory of narrative and appropriation help explain the transformation of the deposit of symbols, metaphors, and motifs in a tradition as they are incorporated into liturgical texts. As works of human artistic composition, liturgical texts reflect the mimetic stages of narrativity. The selection and composition of liturgical texts are generative acts whereby the elements are ordered and emplotted in euchology and hymnody. The composition itself is not the transmission of a dead deposit, but in fact is always able to reactivate the creative poesis of the foundational narratives.

For example, in the final stanza of the main morning anthem, the *ʿônîtâ dlelyâ*, of Great Saturday, the intersection of past texts and present community is evident:

> . . . What is this? The sanctuary was rent at his killing, and at his voice the dead were raised. To the thief he promised the kingdom. He is the Messiah, the vivifier of our mortality. Come

14. Ricoeur, "Appropriation," 97 (emphasis in the original).

> my brothers, let us hasten to his adoration, who for our whole nature tasted death and let us all shout to him without end, "Lord of all, glory to you."[15]

Here, there are three levels evident. The descent motif tradition intersects with the biblical narrative of the Passion ordered to the liturgical context of the assembly. The assembly identifies itself as those who have been vivified because Jesus once tasted death and raised the dead. It emphasizes the praise of God for this action and alludes to the eschatological fullness of the reign of God.

In another instance, at *ṣaprâ* of resurrection Sunday, the assembly hears in the *dbarek:*

> By your resurrection, Redeemer of all, redemption has come to be for all the nations, sin has been dismissed from our race, and death devoured by victory. Great redemption is ours for our redeemer has risen from the grave. . . .[16]

Once again, past event, present situation, and future glory intersect. The assembly discovers in the texts its identity as the redeemed. The temporality negotiated in the construal of these liturgical texts is the memorial of the events of salvation history, the present communion of the faithful in the Holy Spirit, and the expectation of the fulness to come. Taking up the texts, the assembly rediscovers its paschal identity and opens itself to new ways of being and acting in the world that emerge from the mystery disclosed. It is ordered to sinlessness and the glorification of God.

To claim that the liturgy appropriates the tradition is to speak of the particular refiguring and transformation of that tradition ordered to ecclesial communion and eschatological expectation. The refigured texts call for the further appropriation of the

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15. *Ḥûdrâ*, 2:524.

16. *Ḥûdrâ*, 2:536–537.

celebrating assembly. With specific regard to liturgical texts and celebration, in the liturgical celebration the common phrases and words culled from long-lost sources and bygone eras take on new meaning and expression in the situation of the given assembly. But the textual appropriation by the liturgical texts anticipates another event as the given assembly appropriates the texts in question in its ritual action. Liturgical speech is composed in such a way that it anticipates being taken up by others and spoken once more before God from a new setting at a new time. The texts are essentially ordered to future performance, not to be read but spoken aloud in performance in different times and places. Thus, the liturgical text in performance instigates a chain of further refigurations as the assembly discovers itself "entextualized"[17] and ritually inscribed.[18] That is, the assembly comes to embody the ecclesial identity and relationships to the Triune God mediated in the texts through its ritual action.

FRAME OF MEANING: DOXOLOGY AND LITURGICAL PRAYER

The second hermeneutical question concerns how liturgy can be said to provide a new frame of reference for the assimilation of texts. Liturgical texts are an element of human ritual activity before God, oral texts that are performed rather than read. Attending to the specificity of liturgical texts, I turn to the interplay of genres in the liturgy as these are put to

17. The term is borrowed from David Jaspers, *Rhetoric, Power, and Community* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 84.

18. On the notion of ritual inscription, see Nathan Mitchell, *Liturgy and the Social Sciences* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 63–80. Mitchell correlates the theories of Catherine Bell and Talal Asad to present a "technology of ritual" that sees Christian ritual not so much as the performance of meanings as the creation of a ritual body that is the place where truth is revealed and the self's identity mediated.

use for the worship of God. To be able to speak about the transformation, absorption, and erasure of texts assumes that the liturgical texts provide a new frame of reference, a new signifying system. To this end I will appeal to literary and theological implications of doxology to explicate how liturgical language has an essential differentiation of intention than literary or biblical language.[19] Thus, to insert language into the frame of doxology reconstitutes language and places specific demands on it. Doxology interprets the reality about which it sings.[20]

Here, the term *doxology* has a broad and more originary sense. It refers not to the more narrow liturgical unit that closes a given prayer like the anaphora. Rather, doxology is "the explicit and implicit speech of praise, confession of faith, prayer, and thanksgiving, as directed to God for God's glorification."[21] In the case of the East Syrian liturgy, my examination of the liturgical texts for Pasch revealed that the motif is interwoven in the various genres of liturgical prayer and juxtaposed with biblical texts. These genres include *bûyāyê, tûrgāmê, teshbḥatâ, qālê, kārôzwātâ, ṣlawata,* and anaphora. They are the particular

19. My use of *doxology* requires juxtaposing literary genre and theological reflection. Speaking in terms of liturgical genre, there are a number of subgenres embedded in doxology: anaklesis, anamnesis, epiclesis. And there are parallel genres, like oration, exorcism, and benediction. A very good discussion of liturgical genres is Michael B. Merz, "Gebetsformen der Liturgie," in *Gottesdienst der Kirche*, vol. 3, *Gestalt des Gottesdienstes* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1987), 97–125. From a biblical perspective, see Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta, Ga.: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1981).

20. See Teresa Berger, *Theology in Hymns? A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology According to* A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists *(1780)*, trans. T. Kimbrough (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 1995), 157.

21. Berger, 17. As Michael Merz observes, even the liturgical subgenre of a doxology that completes a liturgical prayer intensifies it and directs it to its goal. See "Gebetsformen," 107.

realizations of the common liturgical genres of praise, hymn, thanksgiving, intercession, and offering. That the language of praise, doxology, is the origin and climax of the various genres is particularly borne out by the East Syrian liturgy. From its opening and throughout with its *ṣlawata*, the East Syrian liturgy places strong emphasis on God's glory and the praise of God's glory.

The interplay of liturgical genres has a fundamental doxological orientation. Ricoeur's narrative theory emphasizes the interplay of myth, foundational and historical narratives, poetry, lament, and lyric in the construal of a people's narrative identity. It is in the mix of genres that meaning emerges. But narrative construals, Ricoeur explains, break down in the face of eternity. In the face of eternity, narrative gives way to other forms of discourse, namely, lament, hymn, lyric, and poetry.[22] In a later discussion of intersection of temporality and genres in the Bible, Ricoeur draws attention to the significance of the hymnic genre. In the hymn, he suggests, the narrative events, paranesis of the Law, and eschatological vision of the prophets converge in a powerful way. In the hymn, all of these are taken up in an "utterance that is born of an 'I' or a 'we'" that is spoken in the "today."[23] Thus, he says, "This inclusion of the narrative in the hymn marks the ultimate transfiguration of the narrative" because it recapitulates the narratives in a way that connects them to the present time of worship.

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22. See *Time and Narrative*, 3:272–274. See also "Naming God," in *Figuring*, 217–235, where Ricoeur speaks of the symphony of genres used to name God.

23. Ricoeur, "Biblical Time," in *Figuring*, 179.

The characteristics of the hymnic genre apply to the doxological language of which it is a manifestation. Wolfhart Pannenberg explains that in doxology, "the one who brings his praise sacrifices his 'I' and . . . focuses his attention entirely upon God and away from himself, even if in his speaking he must inevitably use human words."[24] However, these words surrender their ordinary meaning when they are used to praise God. Human beings "release the word from the manipulation of our thought and must learn ever anew from the reality of God" what the words might mean. In the act of worship, human words "are transferred to the sublime infinity of God. . . . They become mysterious, and this can have a reflexive, renovating influence upon everyday linguistic usage."[25] Pannenberg is emphasizing that the words used in liturgy are released from human disposal: Rather than trying to speak about God, they serve to open human beings to the infinity of God. Liturgical speech always retains a metaphoric and poetic stance, for the revelation of God always goes beyond the attribute that worshipers can ascribe.

There is a parallel here to Jean-Luc Marion's formulation of what it means to praise. For Marion, worshipers do not pretend that their attributes of God constitute divinity itself.

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24. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Analogy and Doxology," in *Basic Questions in Theology* (London: SCM, 1970), 1:216. This essay is part of Pannenberg's overall project of an analogical theology focused on proleptic universal history. Pannenberg draws from the German Lutheran theologian Edmund Schlink. For another account of doxology from a biblical perspective, see Walter Brueggemann's presentation in *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1988), 1–28.

25. Pannenberg, 217. Pannenberg may not have appreciated the negative moment by setting doxology in strong dialectic with analogy. See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 412–418.

Rather, people praise God *as*, thus avoiding any categorical statements about God. He explains that this instigates a reversal of the language of attribution:

> *To praise* the Requisite *as* such, hence *as* goodness, amounts to opening a distance. Distance neither asks nor tolerates that one fill it but that one traverse it, in an infinite praise that feeds on the impossibility or, better, the impropriety of the category.[26]

There are two points of Marion's stance here that enlarge Pannenberg's discussion of doxology, namely the creation of distance and the notion of impossibility. To lift up praise presupposes and acknowledges the otherness of God. To praise, then, opens a distance, not to be conceived in spatial terms but in terms of the radical alterity of God as Other. Liturgical language eschews conceptual language in order to point toward the transcendent, to open the assembly to the mystery of God. It corresponds to the relinquishment of self in doxology mentioned by Ricoeur.

Second, the notion of impossibility in doxology recalls Walter Brueggemann's label of doxology as "songs of impossibility" in which human impossibilities become possibilities for God.[27] It also links doxology to the events of salvation history. To take an example, the praise of Israel in the Bible, as Patrick Miller argues, "bore witness to the transformations and reversals of condition too wonderful for any human capability to bring off on its own or even to comprehend. . . . Human definitions are challenged and overturned."[28] These past events

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26. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. T. A. Carlson (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 76.

27. See W. Brueggemann, "'Impossibility' and Epistemology in the Faith Tradition of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:1–15)," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982): 615–634.

28. Patrick Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1994), 224.

are not closed off, but are mined in liturgical speech for what future they hold out. Doxology then is "one of the fundamental indicators that wonders have not ceased, possibilities not yet dreamed of will happen, and hope is an authentic stance."[29] The resurrection of Christ itself, beyond all human categories and logic, is such an "impossible wonder."

The doxological interpretation of the resurrection, then, takes up poetic language in a variety of genres to respond to the salvific acts of God. Pannenberg concludes his discussion of doxology's inherent provisional character by appeal to the proleptic character of history.[30] In line with his eschatological reading of the resurrection, he asserts that human beings cannot yet speak in a unqualified way about the Pasch: Because this event in the past is viewed in union with the future, it is still outstanding from human point of view. Only in the end times will human beings be able to "know the full reality of what has already happened in the resurrection of Jesus, which as yet we can speak of only in a metaphorical manner."[31] What is crucial here is that this outstanding, promissory character does not close doxology, but "opens up room for a plurality of formulations of what happened" in salvation history.[32] Moreover, it allows a plurality of reconfigurations. Doxology itself points ahead, awaiting the

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29. Miller, 224.

30. I am aware that an unqualified appropriation of German Idealism into Christian theology can lead to an underestimation of the presence of grace in the world because it emphasizes the not-yet of completion and may perhaps too sharply contrast the inner-worldly and other-worldly. These issues, including the underlying metaphysics, are well beyond this discussion.

31. Pannenberg, 236.

32. Pannenberg, 236.

final revelation of all God's glory. Doxology also anticipates this and participates in it by allowing the assembly to be open to the event of that glory.

At the same time, the saving acts of God are taken up in doxology and interpreted as an expression of God's glory. This has a twofold ramification with regard to meaning. First, to name an event as an expression of God's glory essentially reorders its propositional content in a way that theological or prosaic expression cannot, by making it an act of hope oriented to the final consummation of God's glory. Second, the naming of the salvific acts of God draws "human beings into a relationship of thanksgiving, confession, and celebration in which the praise of God's *doxa* anticipates its fulfillment at the end of time."[33] Through its enacted doxology the assembly is drawn deeper into the relationship that the event made possible: a communion of all humankind from creation to eschaton in the redeemed life of Christ. This elicits both glorification and testimony from the assembly.

Thus, as liturgical texts assimilate past texts, they do so to express the potential that comes from the events of the past and an ideal of human action in the world. Doxology affirms "that the encounter of adoration and love between God and God's people is the ultimate goal" of the events of salvation history.[34] Doxology anticipates the world to come when all humankind will be drawn into the glory of God. Doxology shapes the relationship between past, present, and future "ecstatically" rather than in a linear fashion.[35] That is to

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33. Berger, 163.

34. Berger, 163.

35. This recalls Martin Heidegger's notion of the ecstatic (*ekstatisch*).

say, it participates in and anticipates that hoped-for world and the unqualified manifestation of God's glory.

The Descent Motif as Doxology

This section has explored two hermeneutical questions, namely the transformation of the descent motif through poetic reconfiguration and the semantic frame of the liturgical celebration as doxology. Together these issues help to explain what is entailed in the intersection and interweaving of the descent motif in the liturgical texts and prepares for a more specific exploration of the theological dimensions of the motif as it appears in the liturgical texts in the next section.

With regard to the descent motif as it is deployed in liturgical texts, the new meanings that the liturgical text engenders "always proceed from a horizon of meanings sedimented in language and inherited from the past."[36] By appealing to Ricoeur's theory of narrativity the relationship between the inherited past meanings, the present of the assembly, and future expectation is clarified through the poetic operations of mimesis. First, the liturgical texts do not simply draw on the available stock of symbols, motifs, and metaphors, but interpret and work on them as they reinscribe them in a new textual situation. The liturgical texts bring the available biblical and literary language of the tradition forward into conversation with the assembly. In such a way it reveals that the memorial of the Pasch as descent to Sheol makes a claim on them and changes their horizons. The appropriation of the motif by the liturgical texts enables the liturgical assembly to discover ways of being and living in the world. This

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36. David E. Klemm, *Hermeneutical Inquiry*, volume 1, *The Interpretation of Texts*, AAR Studies in Religion 43 (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1986), 31.

authentic being is essentially ecclesial being, which is the sacramental mediation of the risen Christ in the world through the Holy Spirit.

Second, the new textual situation is framed as doxology. The descent to Sheol, which in the biblical tradition marked the end of the ability to praise, is claimed as an event of God's glory and an occasion for the people to praise God. The image of the descent claimed in doxology not only anticipates the final realization of God's glory, but through the liturgical celebration is connected with a present sacramental participation in the *ḥayê ḥadtê*, the new life of the resurrection that will be fully realized in the end time.

Third, the doxological character of liturgical language necessitates that when it appropriates an image, motif, or metaphor, it reconstitutes it and reorients it. In terms of its reconstitution, liturgical language is not a rehearsal of the theological or literary language. Rather, it is "deeper and more recondite than is allowed by the extrinsic claims of recognised spirituality and theology."[37] The liturgical language transforms the motif imagery into a cry of the assembly in praise of God's glory. There is also need for this reconstitution because doxology "confronts believers today with the gaps and interstices between the Bible's affirmations and the community's question."[38] The liturgical context itself creates this place of encounter between tradition and assembly that disposes them for the transformation opened up by the doxological language. Doxology thus reorients the biblical and literary language by directing it to God and to the event of the mystery of God. The community is

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37. Jasper, 84.

38. Paul E. Dinter, "The Once and Future Text," in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. C. Evans and S. Talmon, Biblical Interpretation Series 28 (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1997), 390.

bound together by this common rhetoric as it glorifies God and implores God's fidelity to the promise of renewal of life and ongoing transformation.

THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

These hermeneutical reflections lead to more specific theological comment. This section attends specifically to the theological implications of the appropriation of the descent motif by the East Syrian liturgy. The liturgy makes free use of the stock elements of the motif tradition, never totally assimilating to itself all of the elements nor presenting any unified narrative development of it. Rather through the interplay of psalm, hymn, lection, and euchology the liturgical celebrations reinscribe the descent motif in a way that contributes something further to the theological contours of the motif. Here, I will examine how the liturgical appropriation of the descent motif can be said to contribute to the theological tradition's development of the motif in matters of eschatology, soteriology, and pneumatology.

Eschatology

As it draws on the literary tradition, the liturgical appropriation of the theme advances its eschatological dimensions. In the literary tradition, the hymns and metrical homilies placed their emphasis on the emplotment of the events of the Pasch to account for the three-day hiatus between Jesus' death and resurrection as descent to Sheol. Their temporal focus, as was explored in chapter three, involved personification of Death and Sheol, and the imbrication of biblical images and figures and natural imagery. These elements

served to give a comprehensible narrative frame to the descent motif and to elaborate it according to genric circumstance.

Concern for the eschatological ramifications of the descent to Sheol is present in the literary tradition. There, the authors used natural or digestive imagery to convey the impotence of Death. Following Aphrahat, Christ the medicine of life is a poison introduced into Sheol that would gradually spread throughout and kill it. Ephraem speaks of Christ as leaven, the little bit kneaded into Sheol that would gradually rise and "corrupt" it with life. These authors were concerned with connecting the descent with the whole pattern of redemption in Christ that finds its culmination in the so-called general resurrection of the dead at the end of earthly time.

The liturgy, however, eschews the grand narrative style of the literary tradition in favor of short notice that is framed in doxology. Through the liturgical celebration the assembly enters into the world opened in the doxological proclamation of the Pasch. Thus, the focus falls on the lasting outcome of the descent into Sheol and the overturning of death. The assembly seeks to participate in the mystery of the new life of the resurrection whose fullness is yet to come.

This future-oriented motive is particularly evident in the liturgical celebration of the exchange of paschal peace. For example, in the hymnody, the vivification of the dead at the time of Jesus' descent to Sheol is the source of the contemporary assembly's praise and invocation:

> You shook the foundations of Death at the time the wood of your cross was erected, Lord, and in terror Sheol sent away those debtors whom it had devoured. Your command vivified them, Lord, and because of this we also praise you, King Messiah, have mercy on us![39]

What the assembly names in its liturgical prayer is focused on the participation and anticipation of the resurrection of all the dead. It extols the promise that is oriented to the mystery of God who seeks the renewal of all human beings. In the canon with Isaiah 4, this theme is underlined:

> Blessed be the king who descend to Sheol and lifted us up and by his resurrection promised renewal to our race. At your resurrection creatures cried glory for they join in the redemption that is for all.[40]

The liturgy connects the resurrection of the ancients and their testimony to the praise and glory that the assembly makes to God.

In the liturgical appropriation, the descent to Sheol is taken into the temporal frame of past event of salvation, present communion, and future glory to speak of the eschatological promise of the life that no longer knows lasting death. However, its concern for the eschatological realization of the Pasch in the "pledge of the resurrection from the place of the dead" is accomplished through attention to the sacramental participation of the people through eucharist and baptism. The Christian people through their baptism have anticipated the life of the world to come and through the eucharist participate in the resurrection that reigns overall through the Pasch of Christ.[41]

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39. *Ḥûdrâ*, 2:546.

40. *Ḥûdrâ*, 2:551.

41. See the Communion Anthem in the *Ḥûdrâ*, 2:558.

There is here a certain echo of a Mospsuestian sacramental theology, which is strongly eschatological. According Theodore's catechetical homilies, especially on the eucharist, Christ, by his death and resurrection has freed humankind from death and sin, at the same time introducing them into immortality. While Christ has effectively accomplished this in himself, humankind will participate fully only in the final resurrection.

However, through the Church and its sacramental activity human beings anticipate this fullness. The sacraments, as symbols of human being's death and resurrection "give us hope of our future immortality and thereby free us from the fear of death, which is the root of all sin, and so enable us here below to live to some extent in the sinless life of heaven."[42] For Theodore the sacramental celebration is the first installment, the down payment that gives human beings a share in the newness of life. The sacraments thus derive their efficacy from Christ's Pasch, but they anticipate a realized future. Conformed to Christ in baptism the assembly participates in the mystery of the Pasch by conforming itself spiritually to obedience

42. William Macomber, "The Liturgy of the Word According to the Commentators of the Chaldean Mass," in *The Word in the World. Essays in Honor of Frederick L. Moriarty, S.J.*, ed. Richard Clifford et al. (Cambridge: Weston College Press, 1973), 180. The classic work on East Syrian sacramental theology is by Wilhelm de Vries, *Sakramententheologie bei den Nestorianern*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 133 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1947). Specifically on Theodore, see idem, "Der 'Nestorianismus' Theodors von Mospsuestia in seiner Sakramentenlehre," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 8 (1941): 91–148. On the sacramental implications of *rāzâ*, see Irénée-Henri Dalmais, "«Raza» et Sacrement," in *Rituels. Mélanges offerts à Pierre-Marie Gy, o.p.*, ed. P. De Clerck and E. Palazzo (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 173–182.

of Christ who is now exalted.[43] Theodore gives what became the classic expression of thought:

> For Christ our Lord accepted the passion in order to exterminate death utterly by his resurrection; and he promised that we too can share with him in the enjoyment of this future. So it was necessary for Christ to give us this mystery with its power to lead on to our future. Through it we are born again in the sign of baptism, commemorate our Lord's death by this dread liturgy, and receive his body and blood as our immortal and spiritual food.[44]

For Theodore, this newness is sustained by the eucharist, which keeps the baptized in the new life. However, they will come to its fullness only in the heavenly reign, where the very Spirit of God will be nourishment. The sacramental signs are for human beings, in symbols perceptible to humanity in which they participate in the immortality to come.[45]

The appropriation of the descent by the anaphora genre in the East Syrian rite is a prime witness to the eschatological force of the motif. In the most frequently used anaphora, Addai and Mari, the recollection of the passion and death is without mention of the descent. There is no supper narrative or pronounced pleading of Christ's blood, but rather an offering of the "memorial of the body and blood" of Christ.[46] This occurs as the anaphora pleads with God to bring to remembrance the ancestors. The memorial is ordered to this intercession for

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43. On obedience christology in the anaphora of Theodore, see Bryan Spinks, "The East Syrian Anaphora of Theodore: Its Sources and Theology," in *Worship: Prayers from the East* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1993), 56–62.

44. Baptismal Homily 5:10. English translation from Edward Yarnold, ed., *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the* R.C.I.A., 2d ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994), 186.

45. See the baptismal homilies, especially Homily 3:10; 3:22; 3:28-29 and Homily 4:8.

46. See text in Anthony Gelston, *The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 52, l. 40. Gelston translates ܢܣܩ on p. 50, l. 32, as "we offer." "We lift up" or "mount up" might better capture the root ܣܠܩ.

the dead and for the living. It is sealed with the epiclesis that seeks the transformation of the assembly through the gifts that enable participation in the forgiveness of sin and the "great hope of the resurrection from the dead." What is pledged in Christ's resurrection is pleaded by the assembly for its own transformation through sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ. Thus, the imagery of the final resurrection of all humankind is appropriated from the descent motif, rather than from an extended account of the destruction of Sheol.

Soteriology

The second important theological contribution of the liturgical appropriation of the descent motif is in the area of soteriology. Following the theological tradition, the descent to Sheol culminates the work of redemption and inaugurates salvation for all by Jesus' rising and return with Adam to Paradise. Among its many metaphors and motifs for the Pasch of Christ, the East Syrian liturgy keeps the descent to Sheol to the fore. The liturgy thus brings forward an old stratum of soteriology. In doing so it keeps alive its tensive character and unfolds its impact on the Church.

To speak of the redemptive act of Christ as descent to Sheol contrasts with the dominant Western emphasis on propitiatory or sacrificial imagery.[47] While the early western patristic theology of redemption stressed the descent to Sheol, the redemptive imagery is transformed as it is inculturated into the later Latin language of legal process and propitiatory

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47. See Anton Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ à la lumière de l'anthropologie," in *Mort pour nos péchés: Recherche pluridisciplinaire sur la signification rédemptrice de la mort du Christ*, ed. Xavier Léon-Dufour et al. (Brussels: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1976), 45–83.

sacrifice through Anselm.[48] Moreover, the propitiatory interpretation persists into the medieval West because it resonates with the indigenous Germanic interest in sacrifice.[49] Here, the motif of the immolation of the Lamb of God takes a prominence as a soteriological scheme.[50] It appealed to the western tradition's theological development of the sacrificial nature of Jesus' death. Jesus, the innocent victim of sacrifice bore and took away by his death human sin. Jesus was the one who went willingly to the slaughter. His death was expiatory, making reparation for the sin of humankind. As Anton Vergote observes, "This theology polarizes the whole work of redemption between personal and moral salvation. Christianity was narrowed by a preoccupation over the sins of individual human beings."[51]

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48. Gustaf Aulén's classic historical study of the idea of atonement contrasts the Greek and Latin patristic view and the medieval view of atonement (*Christus Victor: An Historical Study of Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, 12th ed. [New York: Macmillan Company, 1966]). The descent motif is implicit in his discussion of the "drama of salvation" and the cosmic conflict between Christ and the powers of evil. That is to say, Aulén does not develop a distinct 'descent soteriology', but his presentation takes in the elements of the motif—destroying death, breaking bonds, deceiving the devil. Aulén does not talk about the developments in soteriology as an inculturation.

49. See the discussion of Saxon cultural expectations in Patricia McCormick Zirkel, "Why Should It Be Necessary That Christ Be Immolated Daily?—Paschasius Radbertus on Daily Eucharist," *American Benedictine Review* 47 (1996): 240–259.

50. See Vergote, 49. I note that the imagery of the Lamb appears in the Syriac-speaking traditions as well as the Byzantine traditions, for example in the former's rhetoric of the paschal lamb of the Exodus (e.g., on the Thursday of the Pasch) and the latter's rhetoric of the lamb and lance (e.g., at the Prothesis and in the hymnody of the paschal liturgies). But these liturgies give strong accent to the descent motif, though the Byzantine contours are rather distinct from the East Syrian tradition.

51. Vergote, 57. ". . . [C]ette théologie polarise toute l'oeuvre de rédemption sur le salut personel et moral. Le christianisme s'y rétrécit dans une préoccupation pour les péchés des hommes individuels."

In the descent motif, however, the accent falls on Christ's having conquered death, which is the ultimate end of sin. By his death Christ destroys the power of death by descending, destroying death, restoring life, and raising up the righteous ancestors, and ascending to paradise. Christ's death is not viewed primarily as a vicarious death for the forgiveness of sin. The destruction of death and restoration of life is construed by means of Adam imagery in the descent motif. The protoparents lost the divine image by their sin. All human beings bear death bodily, being descendants of Adam. Christ, however, retrieved Adam from Sheol and restored him to paradise. Thus all who conformed to the second Adam, Christ, share in divine life. This conformation is actualized in baptism, where the newly baptized are renewed in the divine image by the power of the Holy Spirit.[52]

In this schema, Christ's descent is the key moment in the whole movement of salvation history. The liturgy construes the descent schema as a hinge in the economy *(mdabrānûtâ)* of salvation. This not only links creation, redemption, and parousia. It also gives soteriological weight to the death itself, the being-in-death of Jesus. Adam must be retrieved so that all through the ages who have died can share in the resurrected life of their Creator. The whole movement of salvation history is captured in the descent motif. Adam, the first human, died and resides among the shades of Death. Those who bear his image are consigned to Sheol as well, and only one who is human can pass through the gates. Thus, Christ must put on the body in order to defeat the dominion of Death and most importantly

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52. This is often expressed by means of the 'robe of glory' imagery discussed in the chapter 3, exemplified in Ephraem's *De Domino nostro*.

to recover Adam, the first to bear the divine image and representative of all humanity.[53] Christ's divine Life 'poisoned' Death, which assures that all the dead will meet Christ at the final resurrection.

The descent motif contributes to the other paschal soteriologies. The determinative free act of Jesus' self-emptying unto death on the cross does not result in an immediate or instantaneous resurrection. Rather, Jesus confronts Death itself. Thus, the work of redemption does not end with the suffering on the cross, but the very presence of Christ among the dead. According to the liturgical texts, this effects three things. First, it reveals that the resurrection was not a simple departure from the tomb but was a true death. As the versicle with the *lākûmārâ* asserts:

> The Son of Freedom is among the dead and like the slain who lie in the tombs.[54]

Second, Jesus' descent to Sheol demonstrates that the paschal mystery concerns not just sin or the moral situation of human beings, but the reality of death itself.[55] The anthem *dlelyâ* of the paschal vigil expresses the effects of the resurrection not as a remission of sins, but as new life in Christ:

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53. The more poetic language of the Syriac tradition at this points seems a midrash on 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 and Paul's antithesis of the first and last Adam (1 Cor 15:45).

54. *Ḥûdrâ*, 2:510.

55. See Adolphe Gesché, "L'agonie de la Résurrection ou la Descente aux Enfers," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 25 (1994): 14–15, where he makes a distinction between simple biological death and the theological or 'metaphysical' reality of death, which is the end result of sin. Thus, "*La* mort, et non pas simplement *sa* mort [celle de Jésus], est vaincue"(16).

> The whole creation has been renewed in the Messiah who became the head of new life. For in him the power of death has been loosed and by his voice he raised the dead and behold Satan groans loudly![56]

Thus the Pasch is not simply the taking away of sins of this world, but radically effects our destiny as human beings.[57] Through the Pasch, sin has been forgiven, death had been destroyed in order that all human beings be able to be divinized and share resurrected life. The Syriac theological tradition uses the Adam motif to capture this. As the anthem *dlelyâ* continues:

> Satan . . . says, "Woe to me for I have become a laughing stock to Adam and his children. For behold Jesus has let me go from my power and he plucked my possessions from my hands and by his resurrection he has allotted life to his race."[58]

Adam as protoparent is the first to share in the renewal of the entire human race. The theme of Christ's illuminating Sheol or his preaching to those therein accomplishes his proclamation of the reign of God by allowing it to reach its universality.[59]

As the liturgy presents the redemptive activity of Christ as descent to Sheol, it presents the semantic impertinence of a metaphor: Jesus destroys death by dying. Thus, it keeps alive the tensive character in the motif and brings it to bear on Christians who take up the texts. The metaphorical dimension of the descent motif is particularly expressed in combat imagery. To say "Jesus destroyed death by death" remains ostensibly discordant, for

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56. *Ḥûdrâ,* 2:531.

57. See Gesché, 14–15. Gesché emphasizes that the resurrection is not a crowning moment of the death on the cross, but an integral element of the Pasch.

58. *Ḥûdrâ,* 2:531.

59. See Gesché, 23.

in fact human beings still die. But the newness of reality, the possible world of being that this metaphor opens expresses a theological vision.[60] It communicates that the Pasch of Jesus is irrevocable: Death itself has been radically transformed. It no longer has power; it no longer rules human beings. In effect the order of creation has been restored not by the reversal of human being-toward-death, such that human beings no longer face diminishment or death. Rather, being-toward-death is radically transformed; such death is no longer final. The finite person, through death, now enters the infinite. Human beings definitively share in the newness of life and renewal accomplished fully by Christ, the 'first fruit' from among the dead. In death human beings pass into the mystery of God and are assumed into God's glory, *doxa*.

The liturgical texts express the kenotic soteriology by keeping alive the paradox of the metaphor and reinscribing the descent motif into doxology. The anthem of the rails at the eucharist on Sunday of the Resurrection connects the earthly praise of a given assembly and the cosmic praise elicited by the destruction of death and the restoration of life:

> Mortals, exult and take heart! For the power of death has been broken. The Messiah conquered death by his passion and promised life by his resurrection. Behold, heaven and earth rejoice, the company of angels shout glory to the one who restored life by his resurrection to the human race that had been lost.[61]

The descent and destruction of death are invoked as present realities precisely because the assembly now liturgically participates in the mystery of resurrected life. The liturgical

60. This follows Paul Ricoeur's elaboration of metaphor. See *Interpretation Theory*, 46–53. Janet Martin Soskice has offered a more philosophically nuanced account of metaphor in *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). Her discussion of "dead" metaphors and the function of metaphors as redescriptive or catachretic has particular importance for liturgical language that by its ritual context is repetitive.

61. *Ḥûdrâ*, 2:556.

construal of the descent motif expresses the promise of the originating event of the Pasch even unto the dead, that is, the whole history of human death past, present and future.

Pneumatology

The third aspect of the liturgical appropriation of the descent motif that calls for theological comment is the way the liturgy juxtaposes the motif with the Holy Spirit's descent. Thus, it enriches the motif pneumatologically. While the descent motif is never made to bear the full weight of mediating the meaning of Christ's Pasch in the liturgies of the East Syrian tradition, the motif itself is narrowed by the fact that even in the most intertextual reading, the motif is essentially christocentric. Christ is the principal protagonist in the redemptive activity that leads from cross to Sheol to Paradise. This christocentricism also characterized the literary tradition, that is to say, there is no mention of the role of the Holy Spirit in the subterranean activity of Jesus—his preaching, illumination, retrieval of Adam, or resurrection from the place of the dead.

The liturgy however, extends the literary presentation of the motif precisely by the ritual inclusion of the epiclesis that asks the Holy Spirit to come and grant through sacramental participation a foretaste of the eschatological life to come. The Holy Spirit draws humankind into the new life and renewal of the resurrection. A specific example comes from the blessing over the oil of the baptismal liturgy:

> May the grace from the gift of the Spirit of Holiness come, who is from you, and let it intermingle in this oil and grant to all those who are anointed with it the pledge of resurrection from the place of the dead, which is given for the perfection of the adoption as

> children, for the deliverance from the sufferings of sin and for the sweetness of heavenly rest.[62]

The petitions reinforce the notion that in and through the sacramental elements, the assembly partakes of the new order realized by the Pasch. The relationship of human beings as daughters and sons is perfected. Moreover the "pledge of the resurrection from the place of the dead" becomes a liturgical shorthand for participation in the eschatological life with Christ in God. This inner participation is effected here precisely through the Spirit.

This interrelationship between the Spirit and the Pasch echoes Theodore of Mopsuestia. In his baptismal catecheses, Theodore explains the role of the Holy Spirit in the Pasch and thus in the liturgy:

> By virtue of the sacramental actions, this is the moment appointed by Christ our Lord to rise from the dead and pour out his grace upon us all. This can take place only by the coming of the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which the Holy Spirit once raised Christ from the dead.[63]

The participation in the mystery of the Pasch is precisely through the same Holy Spirit of the resurrection. Thus, Theodore explains, the bishop invokes "the Spirit over the bread and wine to show the body and blood of Christ as truly immortal and over the people who share these gifts that they be one body and be united with Christ and so partake of his divine nature."[64]

In the liturgy the naming of the paschal event in terms of the descent and ascent from Sheol is juxtaposed with the explicit invocation of the Spirit over bread and wine, oil, and

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62. Blessing of Oil, Baptismal *taksâ* in Assemanus, *Codex Liturgicus*, 1:195.

63. *Baptismal Homily* 5:11.

64. *Baptismal Homily* 5:13.

water in the sacramental celebration to transform and bring the assembly into communion with the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead.

The Ethical Dimensions of the Motif

I have set out three key ways that the liturgical appropriation of the descent motif discloses the mystery of Christ's Pasch, namely its eschatological, soteriological, and pneumatological dimensions. However, there remains the need to judge the adequacy of this motif to accomplish its disclosure. That is, there remains an ethical evaluation of the motif because the ultimate end of its liturgical manifestation is the transformation of the Christian assembly. At this point, the interpreter must confront the inherent violence of the motif and the anti-Jewish invective it elicits in the liturgy, as the ancestors are summoned to curse the Jews who put Jesus to death. How can the descent motif contribute to the transformation of the assembly if violence and destruction are its constitutive elements? What can be retrieved from a motif of the Pasch as cosmic victory? The way to negotiate these questions is attention to the metaphoric and mythic character of the language. The invective, however, requires a more radical reappraisal.

Violence and Victory

Already in the biblical underpinnings of the descent motif are the symbolic resources—identified as the first mimetic level—for the imagery of violent overthrow and destruction. Sheol is cast as a voracious creature that holds tightly to its prey. Human beings are ensnared by Death's cords. Sheol's gates or doors close tightly behind the one who descends there. Even in the New Testament, the early kerygma and paranesis speak of the powerful grip of Death that could not hold Jesus who breaks its chains. The early literary

tradition followed these trajectories and extended the imagery. Christ's activities in the realm of the dead take on graphic detail in direct relation to the situation of the shackled dead and the power wielded by Death, Satan, and Sheol. For example, Aphrahat gives a classical formulation of the events:

> He entered into Sheol, and he lead out its prisoners
> He fought with the Evil One, and he conquered him.
> He trod him under foot, and he forced his way in.
> He seized its numbers, broke its gates, and battered its bars.[65]

I noted in chapter three the connection of these images with the military siege of a ciry in the Nisibene Hymns of Ephraem. Further extensions of the narrative include the vomiting up of all the dead including the dead Jesus whose divine life acts as an emetic. The process of vomiting requires a reversal of the body's natural mechanism of swallowing and digesting and a violent heaving of the body. It provides a graphic vehicle to communicate the reversal of the order of death.

Longer narrative elaborations juxtapose two distinct modes as they present violent overthrow, namely the epic and the tragic mode. In epic terms, Jesus the Hero descends surreptitiously, reveals his presence as light and life and in a series of violent *gesta* liberates the dead from the prison house of Sheol. On the reverse, the motif casts the players Satan, Sheol, and Death according to the tragic mode. They are tricked, destroyed, looted, and left poisoned, the effects of which will one day finally be realized. These developments cast salvation of the just as the violent overthrow of the dominion of Death and Sheol. The shackles, chains, and bars require a forceful response from the Savior-Hero. The *passio* of his

65. Demonstration 14:31; Parisot, p. 652, ll. 5–7.

crucifixion is juxtaposed with the *actio* of his death. The silent suffering servant led to the slaughter becomes the God-hero whose might tramples down personified Evil and Death. The defeated Jesus becomes the victorious one.

However, the tradition also juxtaposes these violent images with those of illumination, preaching, and solidarity. Christ's cry on the cross that causes Sheol to quake is reversed in the proclamation of the Good News. The dark shadows of death are dispelled by the light of Christ. Christ, one with the dead in their final destiny, reverses that state to lead them together with him to Paradise. Through these reversals, the descent motif advances that the violence is not a human violence nor the events a continuation of earthly paradigms of oppression, overthrow, and restitution. It presents a paradox: Destruction and violent overthrow of the enemy result in liberation and life.

A danger arises when the fantastic[66] and mythological elements cease to be conceived as imaginative expressions. The East Syrian tradition mediates the motif by means of the tradition's preferred poetic theology developed by symbol and narrative rather than a propositional theology in conceptual or philosophical terms. It is when the complex metaphoric and symbolic languages are reduced to proposition and prose that the danger arises of the elements of the motif being construed in univocal terms that could lead to

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66. The narrative construals of the descent tradition bear an affinity to what Tzetevan Todorov has identified as the fantastic: "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event." See *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. R. Howard (Cleveland, Ohio: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973), 25.

ideology. That is, the metaphorical combat and violence beget literal violence in the name of conquering an enemy. [67]

Western theology has struggled with this flattening of the metaphoric and mythic. For western theology, which prefers the propositional, the descent motif has consistently proved a stumbling block. To classic western theology the descent motif clearly goes beyond what theology can affirm and borders on both idolatry and heresy.[68] These affirmations concern a reduction of the events depicted in Sheol to continuations of the human activity of Jesus, a univocal interpretation of Sheol as hell reduced to doctrinal definition, and the violent activity read in terms of human aggression.

The liturgical language of the East Syrian liturgy provides a corrective to the tendency to either dismiss the descent as sheer mythology or to translate the descent into a propositional language that arrests the reversals of the motif or more alarmingly seeks to distort it to support, legitimate, or reflect violence. The liturgy introduces a careful nuance

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67. The East Syrian Church, as surveyed in chapter four, has a tragic history of successive invasions, migrations, and diaspora. The history of the people is marked by tragedy and suffering at the hands of invaders from the Persians to the Muslims to the Ottomans and Kurds. At the turn of the third millennium, the Church has been largely reestablishing itself on foreign shores. Daily air raids by the United States military throughout the 1990s scarred northern and southern Iraq. It is conceivable that the combat imagery of its liturgical texts with the strong appeal to the descent motif could bolster a continual need to redress the hoped-for defeat of enemies or displacement of aggressors. Such use of the descent motif would provide an interesting parallel with the construal of Jesus as a political messiah in some trajectories of African-American and Latin-American liberation theologies. I am not aware of any particular author in these traditions who takes up the descent motif as a rhetorical strategy for theologizing.

68. Aulén put it this way, "It must be admitted that it is not surprising that many features in the patristic teaching should awaken disgust, such as its mythological dress, its naïve simplicity, its grotesque realism" (p. 47). The West, as recently as Hans Urs von Balthasar, has had difficulty with the activity of Jesus in Sheol, especially where that presumes he went bodily to Sheol. In addition to the body-soul separation, the West also reads into Sheol its later concept of Hell as a place of damnation. This plagued the Reformers' theologizing.

to the dominant imagery of the descent motif in three invocations of the *kārôzûtâ* of the paschal vigil:

> Messiah, who by the resurrection of his holy body the gates of Sheol were broken and he loosed sin and death by his resurrection,
> Messiah, who by the resurrection of his holy body destroyed death and gave us new life and renewed all creation by his resurrection,
> Messiah, who by the resurrection of his holy body made the dead alive in their tombs and raised up all human nature from mortality by his resurrection. . . .[69]

What breaks the gates, loosens sin, destroys death, and raises up is not human force or action, but the resurrection of Jesus. Thus the liturgy stresses the metaphoric interpretation of the descent-ascent and its effects. The gaps and ambiguities of the descent, of the dwelling among the dead in Sheol who are cut off from the presence of God, become points of departure to talk about what new order comes to be in the Pasch of Jesus.

The liturgy sustains what some interpreters name the mythic imagination. Gianni Vattimo has suggested that myth may be able to survive the hermeneutics of suspicion and the program of demythologizing false consciousness. However, he clarifies that it will not be restored to some "original" state, but rather contemporary experience can continue to be marked by a relationship to the myth in such a way that one knows that one is dreaming, but continues to dream.[70] With regard to the descent motif in the liturgy, Vattimo's demythologizing means that the assembly is aware it is singing in mythological imagery but continues to sing precisely because this mythic language is always capable of saying more, always capable of resisting univocal interpretation. As Richard Kearney explains, the mythic

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69. *Ḥûdrâ*, 2:532.

70. See Gianni Vattimo, "Myth and the Fate of Secularization, " *Res* 9 (1985): 34–35.

imaginary retrieved "would be one which abandons all pretense to legitimize myth in terms of metaphysical or scientific foundations, while retaining myth as a secular interplay of multifaceted meanings; an interplay which dramatizes our cultural memories and traditions as historical interpretations rather that idolizing them as timeless dogma."[71]

In short, the assembly recognizes the limits of myth and acknowledges its weakness. From within this weakened framework, then, it is able to recover the traces of the religious content "as models that are hidden and disfigured, but nonetheless profoundly present" because the opposition of rational and mythical is overcome. [72] Thus, they can appeal to the metaphors of the tradition in a productive way. In the mythic and fantastic account of the unmaking of the order of death and Sheol unfolds a new world of potentiality. Here the destructive imagery can retain its metaphorical force, without falling into a fundamentalizing plain-sense interpretation of essentially poetic language. The descent's reconfiguration in liturgical celebration invites once more a encounter with its tensive "is" and "is not."

Thus, a poetic reading gives a better grasp of the descent motif so that its violence and combat imagery are not ideological legitimations of human power or illusory projections of transhistorical or cosmic strife. Rather, it permits a creative reading that moves the assembly to transformation and ethical action enabled by its sharing in the newness of the risen Lord.

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71. Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: From Husserl to Lyotard* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperCollinsAcademic, 1991), 183–184.

72. Vattimo, 34.

Anti-Judaism

In line with an ethical concern is the need to address the anti-Jewish invective that the liturgical tradition appropriates. In my examination of the liturgical tradition, curses and denunciations against the Jews are embedded in the liturgical texts.[73] The patriarchs and righteous dead are invoked to condemn the perfidy of the Jews. Also, the texts go to rhetorical excess in asserting the Christian Church's uniqueness and role in light of the resurrection. For example, in the anthems for the celebration of the peace, the Church's delight is contrasted to the shame of the nonbelievers:

> Groaning to the heathens, shame to the deniers, happiness to the Church and woe to the crucifiers. [74]

In certain ways this anti-Judaism is consonant with pronounced tendencies in the literary tradition. At several points in the literary tradition an invective against the Jews appears, in particular in the Nisibene and Paschal Hymns ascribed to Ephraem and the Anonymous *sôgîtâ* of the fourth century examined in chapter three. Ephraem places blame on the Jewish people for the death of Christ, which results, in his mind, in their rejection by God. It is not only the generation of Jews at the time of Jesus, but future generations as well.[75] Overall

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73. A similar problem faced the Roman Church with the prayer *pro profidis Judaeis* and the Improperia of the Roman liturgy in the aftermath of World War II. See Piet van Boxel and Margaret McGrath, "Anti-Jewish Elements in Christian Liturgy," in *The Jewish Roots of Christian Liturgy*, ed. Eugene Fisher (New York: Paulist, 1990), 161–167. For more historical and theological consideration of the question, see the essays in *Antisemitism and the Foundation of Christianity*, ed. A. T. Davies (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). More recently, Gerard S. Sloyan has taken up the question in his *The Crucifixion of Jesus: History, Myth, Fiction* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), especially 72–97.

74. *Ḥûdrâ*, 2:541.

75. See G. A. M. Rouwhorst, *Les Hymnes pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe*, 1:99–105.

Ephraem is concerned to bolster Christianity and the unicity of the Church over against paganism and Judaism. Thus, Ephraem's anti-Jewish polemic is not an ethnic hatred *per se* but a question of superiority of religious alliance. However, the ethical question still lingers. Ephraem's castigation of the descendants of the Judeans through literal interpretation of a Matthean injunction[76] draws a thin line between the theological and the ethnic.

To turn the descent motif into a vehicle for liturgical deprecation of the Jews and liturgical assertion of Christian triumphalism calls forth strong critique. Whether another appropriation of the literary tradition or the residue of late medieval hatred of the Jews that marked Europe, the texts that condemn the Jews of Jesus' day or their descendants demand reconsideration by the Church of the East. One contemporary commentator on the paschal liturgies explains the invective in these terms:

> [The strophes] are catechetically motivated and [are] presented as a warning against those who decline to confess the saving mystery of Christ's death and who became strangers to this divine truth and finally even its enemies.[77]

No responsible catechesis can malign the Jews, and even Kollamparampil's rhetoric of "strangers and enemies" casts the Jewish people in an unfavorable light. A hermeneutics of suspicion requires a critical reappraisal of the invective language.

In the instances of invective, the theology of the universality of salvation evoked by the descent motif has been subsumed into a ideology of judgment. These curses "seem to

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76. Matthew 27:25. ὁ λαὸς εἶπεν τὸ αἶμα αὐτοῦ ἐφ'ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα ἡμῶν.

77. Anthony George Kollamparampil, *The Life-Giving Paschal Lamb (Great Week Celebrations in the East Syrian Liturgy)*, Catholic Theological Studies of India 2 (Changanassery, Kerala: HIRS Publications, 1997), 138.

express a violence within the human heart that needs the transforming power of God to turn it into love."[78] The way that the liturgy has appropriated the motif by exploiting the anti-Jewish elements of the literary period must be held up against the whole gamut of paschal imagery and the history of the Christian Church. Historical consciousness compels the Christian Church to realize that its identity and heritage is deeply connected to Judaism. It requires an appreciation of Jewish heritage, an acknowledgment of a spiritual bond, and a witness to the integrity of Jewish faith. The curses and blame placed by previous generations can no longer be supported.[79]

The disfiguring of the descent motif as the liturgy refigures it requires a critical stance of a "heterological memorial," to paraphrase Edith Wyschogrod. It is the ethical obligation of memorial to restore voices to the silenced, give hope to desolate, and give a face to the forgotten.[80] The intimate connection between liturgy and justice requires the suppression of the anti-Jewish rhetoric.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored the motif of the descent of Jesus to Sheol in the early Syriac literary and liturgical traditions and its subsequent appropriation by the East Syrian

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78. Miller, 302.

79. See *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Church's Relations withNon-Christian Religions), no. 4 ; English translation in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1996).

80. See Edith Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Other* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Church in its liturgical texts for Pasch and Epiphany. To realize this goal, I adopted a hermeneutical perspective in contrast to more conventional methodologies that concentrate on philological relationships and historical sequences. Rather, I considered the descent as it was embedded in a variety of discursive genres. I examined in turn biblical, literary, and liturgical witnesses to the descent motif. In the Bible Sheol imagery, already imbricated with Near Eastern myth and cosmological symbolism, is deployed to speak of the God of Israel, the God of Jesus. Sheol is revealed to be part of God's creation, and in many instances God is able to control what transpires in Sheol. The imagery of Sheol shifts and collects meaning as it is taken up in the diverse genric contexts of narrative, hymn, paranesis, and wisdom literature. Imagery of Sheol and descent to Sheol persuades readers of the relationship of their world and time to God and is used to construe the definitive redeeming action of God on their behalf.

The early Syriac texts begin assimilating the images and allusions into a more complex narrative frame. They interweave biblical and mythic figures, making the descent an effective image in prayer for release, thanksgiving for deliverance, or hope for the ancestors in the faith. In the golden period of Syriac literature, the theme of Christ's descent to Sheol becomes a key element in the Syriac theological vision as it unfolds the economy of salvation. In this period, there is a fluid relationship between literary and liturgical genres, with metrical homilies, prose commentaries, and interpretive hymns being preferred ways of exposition. From the storehouse of symbols, images, and metaphors, the literary tradition selects and deletes depending on what would make the argument or strategy of persuasion compelling for a particular local setting or liturgical occasion.

In the fifth and sixth centuries, there is a notable shift in the development of the descent motif and its relationship with liturgy. Developments in the theological discourse of the day change what questions are asked of the tradition and what resources are culled to answer them. The descent imagery retains a certain force to it, but already its mythological language undergoes a transformation in light of theological precision. Assessing the literary period as a whole, I detected three strategies at work in the construal of the descent motif: reinscription, amplification, and embedding.

After inquiring into the development of the textual tradition of the East Syrian liturgy, I took up the liturgical texts for the celebration of Pasch, Epiphany, baptism, and the ordinary of the eucharist considered in their ritual context. The liturgical texts are not a fossilization of the tradition but break the language and refigure it at the intersection of text and community at worship, whose rhetorical aim is quite distinct from the poetry of the literary tradition. The liturgical genres and ritual actions delimit the space of interpretation of the motif in relation to the community and its connection to the paschal mystery of Christ.

In light of the investigation of the descent motif in the East Syrian liturgy, I endeavored to offer a more theoretical account of how the liturgical texts wrestle with their intertexts. Here I attended to hermeneutical questions to speak about how the East Syrian liturgy in particular, and by extension other liturgies as discursive ritual acts, appropriate the descent language. I then offered three theological contributions the East Syrian liturgical appropriation makes to wider theological conversation.

Areas for Further Study

My study raises further questions and suggests other avenues of exploration for future investigation. The first set concerns Syriac studies, the second liturgical studies, the third hermeneutics. With regard to Syriac studies, the relationship of the Syriac literary tradition's use and development of the descent tradition would be complemented by a study of other paschal imagery and its appropriation in the liturgy. A variety of ways of emplotting the paschal narrative of redemption coexist and are juxtaposed in both the literary and liturgical traditions. Second, a further elaboration of the rhetorical and cultural field would connect the descent motif to other significant imagery, such as clothing imagery for the incarnation and bridal imagery for the church. These images can then be related to the social and cultural worlds that made them compelling ways of envisioning the divine economy.

In liturgical studies, three questions could be explored. First, the role of the image and its impact on popular piety, devotional activity, and prayer would reveal the extent of the motif's reception by and impact on the imagination of the faithful. To what extent the imagination is stirred by the descent motif would either confirm or question the weight the official liturgical texts place on the motif and its more constrained assimilation of the literary imagery.

Second, the question of the dissemination of the motif in other liturgical traditions calls forth equivalent hermeneutical and comparative studies of the West Syrian and Maronite traditions. Similarly the appropriation of the motif by the Armenian and Georgian liturgies would help the scholar to make further specification of the contours of the motif in the East Syrian tradition. Contextual study of the Byzantine liturgies would help elucidate

the relationship between Syriac and Byzantine hymnody. In the west, the Syriac configurations of the descent motif could serve as a point of departure to help articulate dependence of the Gallican and Mozarabic liturgies on Syriac sources.

Third, by placing its accent on the ongoing interpretation and appropriation of a particular motif of redemption, this study can offer insight into the future composition of liturgical texts in diverse cultural contexts. The complex interweaving and intersection of texts in liturgical discourse, their intertextual relationship with the literary and biblical tradition, the attention to the specificity of liturgical language and the semantic impact of the frame of doxology, attest to the need for adequate strategies of composition that carry on the tradition in creative and transforming ways.

Hermeneutically, the complex interplay of texts and ritual calls forth appeal to other methods of interpretion. For example, semiotic methods can negotiate the interplay of codes and signs, verbal and nonverbal, in the liturgical celebration. Moreover, attention to actual liturgical performance of these texts complements and completes the textual study. Also, a feminist hermeneutic is needed to critique the mediation of identity, power relationships, patriarchal hegemony in the descent motif. For example, the ambivalence toward women among the ancestors, the ambiguous place of Eve in relation to Adam, and language of dominance and power call forth an interpreation to dismantle its power of persuasion in the interest of fully human liberation.

Final Remarks

While this further critical work remains to be done, scholars of both Eastern and Western liturgies can gain from this study, which has sought to interpret the motif of the

descent into Sheol from the perspective of the texts' participation in the breadth of Syriac literary and liturgical discourse. The distinct development of the motif of the descent of Jesus to Sheol in the Syriac literary tradition and its refiguring in the East Syrian liturgy witness in a significant way to how a particular Christian tradition gives testimony from its cultural context to the paschal mystery and the claims it makes on Christian living The motif itself casts the event of the death and resurrection of Jesus in vivid detail and reveals the genius of the Syriac poetic imagination. The descent motif, as appropriated by the East Syrian liturgy, creatively expresses both solidarity with the ancestors and eschatological hope for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. The liturgy reinscribes the motif in the interplay of genres within the originary language of doxology. As the assembly takes up these texts in liturgical celebration, it is disposed to transformation, which by the very nature of sacramental language is ordered to the ethical concern for the other and the world that awaits the consummation of human time.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE OF NUMERATION OF THE PSALMS IN THE SEPTUAGINT, THE MASORETIC, AND THE PESHITTA

LXX	PESHITTA	HEBREW	LXX	PESHITTA	HEBREW
1	1	1	112	113	113
2	2	2	113 (1–8)	114 A	114
3	3	3	113(9–26)	114 B	115
4	4	4	114	115 A	116 A
5	5	5	115	115 B	116 B
6	6	6	116	116	117
7	7	7	117	117	118
8	8	8	118	118	119
9 (1–21)	9	9			
9 (22–39)	10	10	. . .	. . .	. . .
10	11	11			
11	12	12	144	144	145
12	13	13	145	145	146
13	14	14	146	146	147 A
			147	147	147 B
. . .	. . .	. . .	148	148	148
			149	149	149
			150	150	150

APPENDIX 2
MAP OF THE REGION[1]



1. From Rubens Duval, *La Litterature Syriaque: Des Origines jusqu'à la fin de cette littérature après la conquête par les Arabes au XIII[e] siècle. Étude Historique des differents genres, etc.*, 3d revised and expanded edition (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1970).

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